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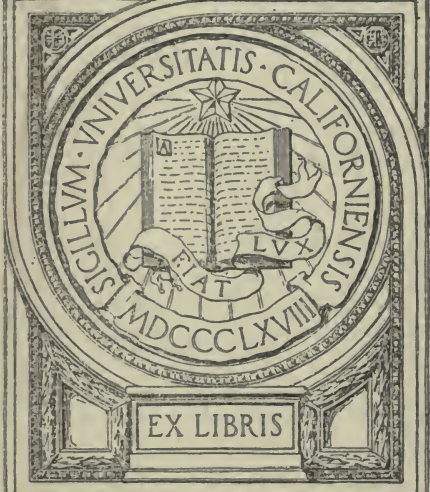


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# WHERE BONDS ARE LOOSED

*NOVELS BY E. L. GRANT WATSON*

WHERE BONDS ARE LOOSED

THE MAINLAND

# WHERE BONDS ARE LOOSED

BY E. L. GRANT WATSON

PUBLISHED AT NEW YORK
BY ALFRED A. KNOPF 1918

*"If I go down to Hell*
*Thou art there also"*

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*Published January, 1918*
*Second Printing, September, 1918*

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*To*

*EDWARD THOMAS*

# PREFACE

*It has been maintained by Friedrich Nietzsche that a man writes to get rid of his thoughts. This is in essence true, but the process is not merely one of excretion. Undoubtedly the writer is often distressingly conscious of being too full of chaotic impressions, also he suffers from the vagueness of his emotion. Besides wishing for relief from this pressure, he desires to make crystalline what is amorphous and vague. Each such re-crystallization marks a stage of development, and is followed by a period of rest. The process of writing besides being excretory is also formative in that it changes the formless to the crystalline. It might be said that the writer becomes subjective that his objectivity may ultimately be the clearer. He writes that he may find his own thoughts. In the process, experience becomes part of conscious knowledge. Life is thus made deeper.*

*In this book a picture is given of a small group of men and women who for the greater portion of their lives have lived in the normal surroundings of material interdependence which we call civiliza-*

*tion. They find themselves isolated on an island, completely cut off from the conserving influence of the herd. Their natures under this sudden relaxation cannot adjust themselves until all former habit and prejudice have been burnt away by the fires of suffering, and until they find beneath their feet the primal foundation of individual desire left high and dry in the ebb of all past valuations and beliefs. This ultimate realization of life can come only to the more primitive individuals of the group; the more complex and finely adjusted natures are broken in the process; they crumble to pieces together with all that they have lost.*

*The story is by no means exceptional. It is typical. Such isolated groups of people exist in hundreds at the further outposts of civilization. Their fates, though showing every variety of detail, are already written. Their success or failure is determined by the relative strength of their individual or social instinct.*

*And here I come to the second thesis of the book. Life can survive all bludgeoning provided that the individual soul is so violently shaken that all its old valuations fall* completely *away. Out of the ruins, life naked and without shame, but beautiful in that naked vitality can rise to new expression.*

*Grant Watson*

# WHERE BONDS ARE LOOSED

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## CHAPTER I

UNDER the iron roof the heat was stifling. The thermometer registered a hundred and ten degrees in the shade, and the metal knives and forks arranged on the tables in the hotel dining-room were unpleasantly hot to the touch. The fans flicked slowly to and fro, sending a faint gust of air, feeble and tepid, to disturb the innumerable flies that clung to the walls and ceiling and buzzed incessantly among the rafters. Although it was midday, and the sun was shining fiercely, the room was lit by electric light, for the windows were closed and darkened to keep out the dust and the heat of the hot wind off the desert. On the walls were oleographs and coloured prints; these, together with the festoons of pink and yellow paper that decked them, were stained brown and made almost unrecognizable by the droppings of flies of countless generations.

Like the rest of the hotel, the dining-room was built of corrugated iron; in it were arranged some fifteen small tables, each designed to seat four diners. About thirty men were engaged in eating their midday meal. They spoke little save to curse at the heat, and their voices mixed with and were drowned by the loud buzz of the large yellow blow-flies that hovered about the plates.

In and out between the tables passed two capped and aproned girls, who looked surprisingly neat and clean by comparison with the rough men they served. The men were a heterogeneous crowd, comprising miners, prospectors and shepherds lately come from the bush. They were dressed for the most part in blue dungarees and coloured shirts, with sleeves rolled up to the elbows. Here and there seated amongst them were two or three store-keepers of the town in their white tropical suits. Among the rougher-looking of the men was a red-haired, red-bearded Englishman. He sat at a table by himself, and seemed a stranger, for he greeted no one. Unlike most big men, he showed in his face no signs of heaviness or slowness of character; on the contrary his irregular features suggested a quick and impulsive temper. His bright blue eyes and trim pointed beard gave him a look at once pleasing and unusual, and there was a suggestion of smartness in spite of his shirt-

sleeves and baggy trousers. His mouth was weak and too small for a man of his size. Even beneath his beard it could be seen to twist down at the corners, giving a suggestion of cruelty.

Sherwin had knocked about in the Northern Territory of New Ireland for the last two years. He had tried every description of work, had been miner, prospector, sheep-shearer, and roustabout. He and his brother, sons of a small farmer in England, had come out from the old country, partly in the hope of a quick fortune, having heard extravagant stories of the gold-fields, and partly from love of adventure and new experience. The two men had gone straight into the interior and there had fallen under the spell of the bush, had been bitten by the lust for gold, by the hope of a fortune that hung always so tantalizingly near, that was so easily within the bounds of the possible and yet was grasped by so few. They had endured many hardships and spent much energy and all their money in the search, and then had been compelled to take regularly paid occupation, that offered no such glorious possibilities. Later they had agreed that one of them should earn regular wages and should supply the other with money, so that he should be able to continue the search. Any gold that was found would then be evenly divided. It had fallen to the red-haired man,

who sat in the stifling atmosphere of the hotel, to be the wage-earner. He had entered willingly into this partnership, and could trust his brother to work as laboriously as he would himself. Lately he had received a letter giving most hopeful accounts of the country in which his brother was working; and now, in spite of the great heat and the maddening buzz of the flies, he was in a pleasant and sanguine mood. His own immediate prospects were also satisfactory. He had lately travelled to Port Kaimera on one of the coasting steamers. He was to stay there for a couple of days and then was going North with a gang of sheep-shearers bound for the interior. Sheep-shearing was a job he thoroughly understood, and one that was well paid. In the meanwhile his brother seemed in a fair way to making a find, and then, if he should at last be successful, Sherwin would join him and help at the making of the fortune that had so long been their dream.

His thoughts, that were wandering among the promising possibilities of an elusive future, were suddenly interrupted by the arrival of a drunken man, who staggered across the room and sat down with a grunt and a lurch in the chair next to him. The man was in the aggressive and quarrelsome stage of drunkenness, when any trifle serves to pick a quarrel.

"Good day to yer," he growled out.

"Good day," said Sherwin, and edged himself and his chair a little further from the reek of the man's breath.

"What yer doin' edgin' away like that? Ain't I good enough to sit next to yer?" He paused and looked hard at Sherwin, then, summing him up, he went on: "Yer bloody Britisher, think yerself damned superior. What do yer take me for?—a bloody aboriginee?"

One of the serving girls came up and said in a voice that sounded as if she were well accustomed to dealing with such small dissensions, "Now then, you two, don't make a scrap over nothing." Then to the new arrival, "Which will you 'ave, pork or mutton?"

"Orl right, Miss," blustered the man, raising himself from his chair; "I'll settle with this chap. I'll teach him how to be'ave."

Sherwin was conscious that several of the men had stopped eating their dinners and were watching to see what would happen. He felt his skin tingle and knew that he was growing angry. He noticed in a flash of annoyance the ugly, distorted shape of the white glass vase that stood in the middle of the table; its sides were encrusted with pink blobs that bore a faint resemblance to strawberries. In it stood a bunch of tarnished artificial flowers.

The dust on these was now faintly stirred by the breath from the red, lowering face that bent above them.

"Well, ain't yer got anything to say? Ain't I good enough to be spoke to?"

"Sit down, and don't make a fuss," said Sherwin; "eat your dinner."

The next moment the man lurched forward, and a heavy hand fell with a splash in the middle of Sherwin's plate. "God damn you, take your hand out of my plate."

As Sherwin jumped up, the man's right hand swung round and caught him a stinging blow on the ear. Then, seeing red for a moment, Sherwin let out at the face opposite. The man fell like a pole-axed beast, and lay still on the floor.

Several of the other diners had jumped to their feet. One of them went and lifted the fallen man, who only groaned and hung limp in his hands. "You needn't have struck him so hard," he said. "Couldn't you see he was drunk? A shove would have done."

Sherwin was still smarting from the blow and the blood was singing in his ears. He expressed a wish that he might have killed the man or any other drunken groper that interfered. The onlookers had now for the most part become silent. They were surprised and rather contemptuous at

Sherwin's outburst, and at the completeness of his anger. There was something perhaps about his red beard and burly figure that annoyed them and made them resent this stranger who had lost his temper with a drunken man and now had so much to say for himself.

A small group formed about the stricken man and some one dabbed his face with cold water. As he was carried out he was sick in the transit. Murmurs of indignation were heard and sneering remarks made at Sherwin's expense. Then a big dark man, who had sat in silence till now, got up from his chair and walked across to Sherwin. He looked round to see if his audience were with him, and then spoke in a condescending, sneering voice:

"Pretty easy to hit a man when he's drunk; no chance of his hitting you back, is there? Perhaps you daren't have done it if he were sober?"

Sherwin was exasperated. "What do you expect me to do? Sit still and smile? Why, he hit me first, and put his dirty hand in my plate."

"Perhaps you wouldn't have hit him if he had been sober," reiterated the dark man.

"What are you driving at? What do you want?" demanded Sherwin.

"Come outside and I'll soon show you."

One of the onlookers, an excitable, wiry little

fellow, piped in a shrill voice, "That's right, Jim Shepherd, teach him a lesson. Wipe the floor with him."

Sherwin was unpleasantly conscious that he was a stranger and alone amongst feelings that were far from friendly. He didn't want to fight the big, dark man, who was probably an old hand at a game where he had little experience. No, he didn't want to fight. He felt suddenly afraid, and was ashamed of being afraid.

"I've got no quarrel with you, why should you quarrel with me? Leave me alone."

"Come on, d'yer hear!" shouted Shepherd, seizing the front of his shirt and dragging him a step forward. "Come on, cocky, and have yer head knocked off!" piped the excitable little man.

As he walked across the room, Sherwin knew that he was white and trembling, he felt sick and annoyed, and was vaguely conscious of a press of men round him, all eager to see the fight in which he was to take part.

Outside the drinking-saloon was a large covered-in court in which were arranged divans and deck chairs. On the other side of the court were rows of bedrooms. A space was soon cleared in which Sherwin found himself face to face with Jim Shepherd. Judging by appearances, the two men were evenly enough matched; but one of them

was fighting on his own ground and of his own inclination, while the other wished himself well out of it and felt the odds to be against him.

"Put 'em up," shouted his antagonist. Sherwin held up his hands. He stood almost still, only slightly shifting his feet; in front of him he watched Jim Shepherd dodging up and down, then with a feint and a rush came the attack. He felt his head jerked back and suddenly a tremendous blow on the mouth. He tasted blood, felt his beard to be moist with it and saw red stains upon his shirt. A voice called, "That's the style, Jim, cut his mug open." Sherwin jumped back, recovering his balance. His antagonist was there close in front of him again, with head and fists bobbing up and down. Then rage seemed to grip at his heart and to swell in his chest, till he was almost choked. He felt that his face was twitching uncontrollably, that the corners of his mouth were drawn down as if he were going to cry. A thin voice laughed somewhere infinitely far away. "Now then, Johnny, swallow yer teeth and smile." Then an immeasurable rage swept him forward against his opponent.

The unexpectedness and fury of his attack carried them both to the other side of the court, up against the iron wall of the saloon. Then, as through a red mist, he saw a dark head pressed

backward. He struck at it, right and left, half-arm hits, with all the strength of a man inured to the hardships of the bush and to long hours of heavy work. In front of him the head jerked from side to side; sometimes he hit it, sometimes he hit the iron wall behind, but mostly he hit the dark, blood-stained face.

When he was pulled off by half a dozen strong hands, the head hung limply and the body of his enemy slid sideways into a heap. Half sobbing, half choking with excitement, he asked if any one else wanted to take him on. Then, suddenly ashamed of his boastfulness, he made off towards his room.

For some minutes the spectators of this last scene stood about in groups discussing the various points shown by Sherwin and his antagonist. Previous brawls were remembered and comparisons made. There came about a marked change of feeling in Sherwin's favour; now that he had proved himself, they were prepared to laugh at and rather like his boastfulness and excitability. In one of these groups was a small fat man neatly dressed in a well-cut white suit. He was a government official, and was at that moment on the lookout for an overseer and stockman for an island some miles from the mainland.

Kanna Island, a long thin stretch of limestone

rock, covered partially by sand-dunes and swept by all the winds, had been set apart as a Government Hospital for Sick Natives, and Mr. Stair had been directed to look out for a man who would look after stock, and who could if necessary take on and knock to pieces any refractory nigger. In Sherwin he saw precisely what he needed. A man with that amount of physical strength and nervous force should, if he could gather sufficient self-assurance, be well fitted for the work. Besides, being an Englishman, he would be more likely to take up work involving loneliness and isolation, such work as a New Irelander would naturally shy at. There was no doubt the post had its disadvantages, and he might have difficulties in finding the right man. On the other hand, the pay was high, and it was worth while seeing what the red-haired fellow had to say. He hung about, waiting for Sherwin to make his appearance.

That evening found the two men seated together in the private bar, drinking whiskies and smoking cigars provided by the fat man. They had spent the last half hour together, and friendly relations had been established in all directions, and now Mr. Stair had taken him aside to make a business proposition. "You don't happen to be out of work, do you? If you are, I can put you in the

way of a good job. A good job with high pay. It's just the thing for a man like you. There's nothing against it save that you may be a bit lonely at first."

"What sort of a job?" asked Sherwin.

"I'll tell you about it. I daresay you've heard of this new scheme of the Government's about making a native hospital on Kanna and Fenton Islands. The idea is to catch all the sick natives and put them on these islands, and cure them, or anyway prevent them spreading their diseases to the others. The women are to be on Fenton Island and the men on Kanna. On Kanna they are going to start a sheep and cattle station; they want some one to look after it and at the same time to keep discipline among the natives. A great many of them will be well enough to work on the station and will do any odd jobs that the doctor may want doing for the hospital. Don't be in a hurry to say whether you'll take it or whether you won't. There's good pay, three pounds a week and a house, a good house, provided and food, so you'd have no expenses, and there's a native servant to cook for you and look after you. Not one of these aborigines, but a Solomon boy who can talk English well and is a good cook. Dr. Hubbard has a house on the island and will spend half his time there and

half on Fenton, where the Government have built a big hospital, and put in a couple of nurses. They say they're going to build a big place on Kanna Island too, so you may not be long without company."

"What about the natives? Are they infectious?" asked Sherwin.

"Oh, there's no fear of your getting anything. You'll only have to do with those that are convalescent, to see they do their work and that sort of thing. Not the least danger. Don't you fret about that," laughed Mr. Stair.

Sherwin was silent for a few moments. No doubt the offer was a tempting one. "Three pounds a week, you say, and the house, and all provisions included? Well, I reckon I can make the niggers do as I tell them. I can always get on well with niggers." Then, after a pause, "What sort of a man is the doctor?"

"Dr. Hubbard's a very nice fellow, very popular with every one. Of course both islands are under his charge, and you'll have to take orders from him. You'll find him a very nice, easy-going fellow." Mr. Stair looked hard at his man, then added, "I may tell you that, if you take the job, your pay starts from the time you sign on, and you won't have to cross for another fortnight or so, when Mr Hall, the Under-Secretary of the

Aborigines Department, is going over with a batch of some forty niggers."

Besides the good pay and the comfortable quarters, there was something in the strangeness of the job that attracted Sherwin. The thought pleased him that he would be ruler on his own island. He would be able to work when he liked and stop work when he liked. He would have his own servant and his own house, and would be in a more independent position than any he had been in since he had entered New Ireland. They sat late into the evening, Sherwin asking excited questions about the island and receiving always satisfactory and promising answers. Before they rose he had signed an agreement, stating that for the next six months he would take the position of stockman and foreman on Kanna Island.

By the time the agreement was signed both men had drunk a good deal of whisky. They were in high spirits and very pleased with themselves and the world in general. Several other men had joined them, and the row of the afternoon seemed to be forgotten. Mr. Stair—they always called him "Mr.," not out of deference but because he was small and fat—was very well pleased to have secured his man and now found occasion to be facetious at Sherwin's expense.

"I hope you don't take much interest in the

petticoats? You won't find many of the fair sex on Kanna Island."

Sherwin answered with a grunt.

"Ah, I see," continued Mr. Stair, "he's one of the pious kind; he doesn't take no interest in women."

"You bet," laughed Sherwin, his pride touched in a sore place, "I can walk down the street with my hat on one side with the best of them."

Mr. Stair exploded in a drunken laugh, "By God, I bet you can! Well, you had better make the best of your time, for you won't find even a black gin on Kanna Island." Then as if struck by a happy idea, "Will you come and see what the town can offer?"

"I don't mind if I do," said Sherwin, and the two men went out.

## CHAPTER II

THE Government cutter, "Shark," which usually plied between the islands and the mainland, was too small to carry the load of natives, so a lugger of some thirty tons had been chartered to take them over to Kanna Island. The "Sea Gull" had been used for many years as a pearling lugger on the northern coast, but about two years back had run on a mud-flat with a heavy cargo, and was thought to be done for. She was sold by auction for a few pounds, and then a gale had come with a strong spring-tide and washed her off. Her new owner let her out to carry cargo from one coastal port to another. She was now anchored two miles out to sea under shelter of the outermost mud-flat. Her freight of natives was already on board, and she was only waiting for the white men who, it had been arranged, should come on board the first thing in the morning. But a strong easterly breeze had sprung up, which had made embarking from the pier impossible.

The town of Kaimera is situated at the mouth of a big river, that, in the wet season, sweeps its

sediment far out to sea, forming mud-flats that make it impossible for boats of any size to come in to shore. A pier two miles long has been run out across the mangrove swamps, and reaches to deep water. Against this large ships can lie up, but any smaller boat is afraid to go near in rough weather for fear of being beaten against the piles. For this reason the "Sea Gull" had been compelled to seek shelter under the lee of the outermost mud-bank.

The only way for Sherwin and Mr. Hall, the Under-Secretary of the Aborigines Department, to reach her was to sail out in an old ship's boat that was generally used for provisioning the "Shark." Pomfrey, the captain of the "Shark," was to take them out and bring the boat back.

Both men were annoyed at this unexpected delay, and were anxious to make a start, but Pomfrey was not to be hurried; he was too old a sailor to be unduly stirred by a couple of landsmen, and he knew well that the situation was in his hands, and that at any rate it would be a longer job than they supposed, with the breeze coming straight from the sea. At last the boat was loaded with her cargo of packing-cases, and then Sherwin's boxes were bundled in, and he and Mr. Hall had to run through the waves and jump aboard as best they could.

Perched on the boxes, and shielding themselves from the spray with an old sail, they had a long, wet time of it, full five hours, and were kept constantly on the move, having to crawl under the boom every time the boat tacked.

Pomfrey seemed to enjoy their slow passage, though he constantly cursed at the boat for making so much lee-way. He looked a fine figure of a man, with his white hair and whiskers blown by the wind, and his watery blue eyes looking keenly out of his red babyish face. All his life he had lived on the sea, though some years earlier he had been disqualified from any responsible command on account of his habit of drunkenness. His feet, that were wedged against the boxes to hold him firm in his seat, looked hardly like the feet of a man for they had become much swollen through constant exposure to the sun and the salt water, and were spread out sideways like the terminations of some sea-monster. All the latter part of the journey Sherwin was nervous and ill at ease, for capfuls of green water kept coming over the side of the boat, and it seemed to him quite probable that, with their heavy cargo, the boat would suddenly drop away from beneath their feet. Indeed, by the time they reached the lugger, the boat was half full of water, and the old man ad-

mitted that in another ten minutes she'd have foundered.

On the lugger a strange sight awaited them; all the hatches were open, and in the shallow hold were standing some forty natives, pressed close together, their heads just coming above the level of the deck. They looked miserable and suffering pieces of humanity, and from their close-packed bodies came a pungent odour which permeated the whole boat, and which even the sea-breeze could not dispel.

"By God, don't they stink!" ejaculated Sherwin, as he viewed for the first time the men whom he was to discipline.

"It's not so much the niggers, though I don't say they haven't got a smell of their own, but it's the Sithi," said Pomfrey. "This boat's been Sithi collecting, and when once a boat's carried a cargo of them, she'll never get rid of the smell. You'll have a pleasant voyage of it," he added, cheerfully. "I wouldn't be surprised if it took you twenty-four hours to get across in this head-wind."

"And what are Sithis?" queried Sherwin.

"A sort of pearl shell, that they make buttons of," said the old sailor. "There used to be plenty of them on the coral reefs about here. It's

a conical-shaped shell, and fetches just now about twenty pounds a ton. You can never get the fish out of them altogether. A little bit breaks off at the far end, and that goes bad and stinks. When once they've been on board, it takes a long time to get the stink out of a boat."

The natives were indeed in miserable condition. They had been on board all night, and as most of them had never seen the sea before, they were very much frightened. Of necessity they were chained together by light chains that went round their necks. Sherwin, who soon found that one or two of them could talk pidgin English, spoke to them in a friendly manner, trying to assure them that they would soon get to a comfortable camp and plenty of tucker. They grinned miserably, but were pleased that any one should take notice.

When the boxes and packing-cases were arranged on the deck, there was little room left for the men. The skipper, a Dutchman, swore that he had never carried a worse cargo, and that nothing would induce him to carry one like it again. Of the journey Sherwin remembers very little, except that he was very sick, and that all the latter part of the time he slept on the anchor, to which he was securely hitched by a friendly seaman, who saw that he was in danger of rolling into the sea.

The natives were also very sick and frightened, and they were all glad enough to get into calm water the next morning and to see the coast stretch before them in a long line of broken cliffs and sandy beaches.

Kanna Island is eighteen miles long running north and south. It is not more than a mile wide at its widest. Of the same shape and direction is Fenton Island, which lies to the southward of Kanna and is separated from it by a narrow though deep channel. The east coast is rough and precipitous; against it break the rollers of the Pacific. On the western coast there are broken cliffs and shelving beaches that lead down to calm water.

The two islands together form a barrier that encloses and protects Dolphins Bay from the ocean rollers. Towards the north point of Kanna, some two miles from the north cape, the Government have made a rough hospital for male natives. The buildings are placed well and sheltered by sand-hills, and a long narrow inlet offers a good mooring. On Fenton Island there is only one possible landing place and that is far to the southward. Here a large hospital for women has been built. Between the two settlements there is a distance of some thirty miles or more.

The lugger now stood in for the bay near the

north point, where two houses could be seen, looking very large and important from the sea.

Now that they were in calm water, Sherwin began once more to take an interest in the things about him. The view of the island was by no means unattractive. The houses looked comfortable and well-built, and he anticipated with pleasure landing and making journeys of discovery.

In a few minutes they had sailed in close under the cliff, picked up the moorings and dropt sail; then came the work of getting the natives ashore. These poor fellows were in a miserable condition, though they had remained silent and uncomplaining. Most of them had been very sick and were cramped from being so closely packed. One by one they were lifted out of the hold, and then, in sets of four, were sent ashore in the dinghy. Sherwin and Mr. Hall were the last to be landed, and they were met on the beach by Dr. Hubbard, a kindly-looking, thick-set Englishman. Sherwin's first impression of him was of a country squire, somehow very much out of place; but when the doctor squeezed and held his hand unnecessarily long, he was oddly reminded of the village vicar of his own school-boy days. After greetings and questions about the natives, the doc-

tor asked Mr. Hall to come up to his house, and told Sherwin that Coffee, the Solomon boy, would prepare dinner for him at his own quarters.

The two houses were separated by a high sand-hill; both faced westward over the harbour and could be seen from the moorings; but it was not possible, on account of the high sand-hills, to see the doctor's from Sherwin's house. The first taste of the long solitude that was to be his lot came to Sherwin as he stood in the doorway of his house and looked out across the white expanse of the dunes; and later he found it curious to remember how his sensation had been one of pleasure at the thought of being alone. For the first two days he was left very much to himself, for the doctor and Mr. Hall, who seemed to be much occupied at the hospital, did not trouble him with a visit. He spent most of his time in exploring the island and looking for the twenty-four head of cattle and the three hundred sheep that had been landed some three months earlier. He was pleased with his first impressions of the land; it was much better than he had anticipated. The east coast was rocky and precipitous and of high ground, which afforded shelter to the central and western portions. These latter were covered with bushes of myrtle, acacia, sandal-wood and low

scrub of all descriptions, in and out of which hopped wallabies and bandicoots. On the west coast there were fine beaches, and it amused him to watch the armies of long-legged crabs that every evening marched along the sands. Of the cattle he found no trace, save one bleached skeleton caught on a ledge of rock half-way down a cliff. He concluded that all the rest must have met their end by falling over into the sea. The sheep and goats were still there in wild flocks, that never let him get within less than a quarter of a mile.

Mr. Hall stayed only two days, then, having delivered his charge of natives into the doctor's hands and having inspected the temporary hospital that he had ordered to be built, he sailed away back to civilization.

The morning after his departure the doctor called at Sherwin's house and they went on together to the native camp. Thirty of the men were well enough to do work; these Sherwin was instructed to set to the making of roads. The hospital was a very simple building. It consisted of three walls made of tarred canvas and a corrugated iron roof. In it there were ten beds. In the beds were sick natives, broken and hopeless pieces of humanity who lay still all day and looked out across the bleak expanse of sand-dunes, under which they were destined to be buried, and

thought regretfully of their beloved and far-away bush. Some other fifteen, who were not considered well enough for hard work, hung about and did odd jobs and waited on those who lay in bed.

The doctor and Sherwin got on well together. Every morning they went down to the native camp. Sherwin would set the natives to work on road-building and the doctor would be busy at the hospital. At twelve o'clock the two men would go down to the beach and bathe together. Then they would go back to their respective houses. Sherwin would have his dinner served to him at half-past twelve, and the doctor would have his at half-past one. This served to show their difference in status. The afternoons they spent at their own sweet pleasure, lounging in their different ways. Sherwin lay on his bed and read back numbers of magazines and newspapers, or else walked out with a gun after wallabies, and the doctor sat on the veranda of his house smoking a pipe and writing in the journal that he sent to his wife in Kaimera. After the evening meal, the doctor would sometimes go round to Sherwin's house and the two would walk along the beach or sit talking on the veranda. The relation that grew between them it would be difficult to define. The doctor, when he remembered the conventional view of their difference in status, felt that it was a

condescension to spend so much time with a rough, ill-educated man, but when he forgot the conventional view, as he usually did, he was glad enough of Sherwin's company and glad enough to take his advice too. In fact, in a short time, it was Sherwin who decided what was to be done on the island.

Dr. Hubbard had not been a success in his profession. He had got the reputation for carelessness, and consequently his practice had suffered. This indeed had been the cause of his taking his present job, which was very little to his taste. Sherwin, on his side, liked, though rather despised, the doctor, and was very glad of his company. He never forgot who was nominally the chief, but at the same time managed to get his way. The natives at once understood the situation, and one and all looked upon Sherwin as their boss.

Weeks and months passed, and from time to time Hubbard used to sail over in the "Shark" on short visits to Fenton Island to the women's hospital, which was looked after by his assistant, Mr. James, and two nurses. While he was away, the natives on Kanna Island looked after themselves, as far as doctoring was concerned. It was in one of these intervals that Sherwin decided to talk to Coffee and find out what sort of a fellow he was. So far he had taken little notice of the black, who

cooked well and kept the houses clean for the white men, but beyond that showed no difference from any other black boy. One evening, when Sherwin was sitting at dusk on his veranda, he shouted out to Coffee to come to him. The black came noiselessly like a shadow. "Sit down," commanded Sherwin. Coffee sat down.

For a while there was silence while the white man puffed at his pipe; then suddenly he asked, "What are you eating?"

"I not eat um anything." Coffee spoke pidgin English, which he had picked up from the aborigines.

"What are you chewing then?"

"I chew um Yangona root. Bymeby spit um out. Mix um with water. Make um good drink." Coffee produced a little bowl into which he was spitting the chewed fragments of a white root. "Country where I come from," Coffee went on, "all the young girl chew um up and spit um out; make um plenty good drink."

"What, you mean to say the girls chew this stuff up, and then spit it out for you fellows to make a drink of?"

"That's right, master."

"Well, I'm blowed!" said the white man; then, after a pause, "What does it taste like?"

"Plenty good, master."

It was in this way that Sherwin first learned of Kava drinking. That evening he watched Coffee make and drink a bowl full, and then saw with what happiness and contentment he sat smoking his pipe. Every evening after this, Coffee used to come on to the veranda and make his drink; Sherwin would talk to him and question him about his own country. As time passed, his first somewhat contemptuous curiosity gave place to genuine interest in what the black fellow had to say. Sometimes they sat for hours in silence, thinking their separate thoughts of the different lands they had come from. Above them was the cloudless, star-glittering sky, and beneath the sky the white sand-hills, and beyond the sand-hills the long line of breakers upon the beach and beyond them the dark, far-stretching sea. Sometimes Sherwin was moved to get up and walk away by himself. He felt the beauty and the solitude of the place; and the pleasure he got from it made him long the more passionately for his own land and his own people. When he returned, the black figure would still be sitting silent and motionless on the verandah. Night after night Coffee's dark figure came quietly up the steps. He paused to look at the white man, who sat smoking in a deck chair, and, if Sherwin made no remark, stepped noiselessly into the shadow of the door, sat him-

self upon the floor, his bowl between his feet, and solemnly began to chew the dry white lump of Yangona root. So quiet was it that the wallabies would come into the house by the back-door, then suddenly, coming upon Coffee's squatting figure, would leap over it in affright and shoot down the steps and away into the scrub.

One evening Sherwin told Coffee to bring him some of the Yangona. Instead of chewing the roots, he rubbed them down to a fine powder on a rough stone, then mixed the powder with water.

Coffee watched with keen interest. "That right, master. That make up good drink, you see!"

At first he did not like the new drink, but Coffee urged him to persevere, and it was not long before he began to appreciate its pleasant after-effects. Then he also learned to chew the root, and the two would sit together every evening making and consuming their separate drinks. With a curious clearness and lightness in his head and a feeling of heavy numbness in his legs, he would sit contentedly listening to the noise of the distant waves beating on the shore.

As time went on, Hubbard's visits to Fenton Island became more frequent and more prolonged, so that he was often away for three weeks or more. At these times Sherwin had un-

disputed control of all on the island. Every morning he would set the natives to work, then he would go down to the hospital and talk to the sick blacks, and see that those who were supposed to look after them did all that they were ordered. He treated them with a friendly brutality which they understood and rather liked. He never was deliberately cruel, but would amuse himself and them at the expense of any one who came particularly under his notice. For example, there was one man with a diseased and twisted foot who could not walk straight but could only shuffle sideways. This man Sherwin would send on errands and tell him to look sharp or "he would skin him alive," and then he would laugh to see him shuffle off sideways in his endeavour to make haste.

Coffee often came with Sherwin on his visits to the camp, and seemed always to know exactly what was expected. Often he would do what was required without having received any orders. He was like an intelligent dog who loves his master and will do anything to please. Gradually Sherwin began to feel his power. It was a new and exciting sensation to feel that he had the power of life and death over every man on the island, and that Coffee for some unexplainable reason was willing to do anything he was told.

The temptation to test his power came upon him one morning, and he called out, "Coffee, you not to eat anything all day. Do you hear?" "Yes, master." "Not to eat anything till I tell you you may. Do you understand?" "Yes, master."

That evening while he was eating his supper he asked Coffee if he was hungry. "Little bit hungry, master," and the black grinned shamefacedly. Purposefully he left some meat on his plate, and went the last thing at night to see if Coffee had eaten it; but it was still there. The next day he kept Coffee close to his side, and in the evening again asked him if he were hungry. "Yes, master, little bit hungry." Sherwin told him to bring a plate. He divided his dinner in half. "Now sit down there on the floor and eat that."

Coffee's obedience was from that moment converted into a passionate devotion.

## CHAPTER III

ISOLATION and loneliness work strange changes in a man. At first Sherwin had enjoyed the sense of freedom that his position had given, then as day followed day with its inevitable monotony he had longed with an acute and desperate longing for the comradeship of other white men, and then as the weeks and months went by he became reconciled to his isolation and began to perceive the many compensations that his position carried. There was little work to do and very good pay. He tasted power and authority over others for the first time, and these would be difficult to give up. In fact, he became very soon accustomed to the new way of life, and each day that he stayed on the island he sank deeper into the groove of habits worn by the regular recurrence of events. When at the end of his first six months he received a letter urgently pressing him to stay on for another twelve months, he did not find it difficult to consent. The one grievance that he admitted to himself was that he was compelled to live without the companionship of

women. Remembrance of past experience often possessed him. Yes, he did want a woman, and in this respect he thought enviously of Dr. Hubbard, whose longer visits to Fenton Island he attributed to the presence of the nurses. He counted up his money and calculated what he would have in six months' time, and wondered whether he would take a holiday and perhaps get married, or at any rate persuade a woman to come back and live with him.

It was about two months after he had decided to stay on that new difficulties came into his life; some of the most sick and decrepit of the natives became fly-blown. Dr. Hubbard stayed away often for weeks on end, and consequently the natives were much neglected. Their wounds and sores were left uncared for, and the flies that buzzed ceaselessly about were able to settle on and drop their eggs on the weaker patients, who had not the energy to be always brushing them off. Out of the eggs came small maggots, which ate their way into the flesh and then grew into large maggots, and the natives suffered. Even when the doctor was on the island things were little better, for, being a born slacker, he was a man who hated his position and took no pride in his work. He looked upon the natives as a dying race, and would often say, the sooner they died

out the better. Besides, to have made things really hygienic would have needed hard and sustained effort, and this he was incapable of making. Every now and then, to ease his conscience, he would go down and chat friendlily with them and dab their sores with some antiseptic, and when one or other of them died, he would read the burial service, while Sherwin stood by with his hat off and Coffee filled in the grave he had dug. It was not to the doctor that the natives learnt to look in times of pain and distress but to Sherwin, whom they saw every day, and whose natural feeling of kindness prompted him to ease their distress. Whether the doctor was on the island or not he would go down to the hospital every morning and pick the maggots out of the sufferers' eyelids and wash and dress their wounds.

One day he happened to get a scratch on his finger. At the time he thought little of it, but instead of the wound healing, little yellow marks formed at its edges, and he felt throbbing pains in the upper arm and under the arm-pit. Then his arm swelled and became unnaturally red, and the wound on his finger grew larger and looked worse every day. Sherwin was frightened, and, since the doctor was away at Fenton Island, there was no one to turn to in his distress. At first he tried the simple though brutal remedy of scrub-

bing the place hard with soap and water and a nail-brush. Then he went to the doctor's house and broke open the medicine chest and applied some of the antiseptic that he knew the doctor used among the natives. Every day he dabbed the place, and yet it grew worse and worse, and all the time there was no sign of a sail. Three weeks had passed since the doctor's departure, and Sherwin told himself that any time now might see him back. Every morning he would rise early and climb to the top of the high sand-hill and look eagerly southward in the hope of seeing the longed-for triangle of white that would mark the approach of the cutter; but always he would walk back to the house disappointed and gloomy.

The pain in his arm was now so great that at night it would keep him tossing upon his bed unable to sleep, and his anxiety preying upon his loneliness made him morose and sulky. He no longer joked and amused himself with the natives, but after having set them to work he would stand by gloomily watching them and would curse at any man who shirked or who did not instantly obey. During this time Coffee served him hand and foot, bore with his roughest tempers, and seemed with uncouth grimness to sympathize with all his complaints. Twenty times a day the white man would send him on to the hill to look out

for the hoped-for sail, and always he would report: "Nothing, master. Not one yet. He come by and bye." Sherwin would mutter to himself cursing the doctor and the island and the ill-luck that had brought him there.

Another week passed and yet no relief came. Something instinctive prompted Sherwin to stick to his work. Should he drop that, he might go mad with exasperation and fear. He even stuck to his gratuitous and self-imposed task of tending the sick natives. He felt more sorry for them than ever before. They, like himself, were injured by the doctor who neglected to do his duty. Previously he had felt a kindly sort of compassion and had been pleased to do anything to lessen their sufferings. Now, he was bitterly indignant; he was a fellow-sufferer, and he cursed from the bottom of his heart the easy-going Hubbard.

Sometimes when Sherwin was exasperated by the constant throbbing in his arm, and tired of the sight of his house and its untidy rooms, he would take long walks over the island. With food in a knapsack and a bottle of water he would often walk twelve or thirteen miles from the settlement and reach remote parts that probably had never been trodden by human foot. To the north there were stretches of high sand-dunes, bleak and

white, with only a few clumps of grass clinging desperately to their edges. Here and there in the valleys and levels between the hills were large tracts of thick undergrowth, thorny and impenetrable, about which red and white butterflies clung and fluttered in thousands. And always the hot sunlight blazed from a cloudless sky and the hot wind blew by him to ruffle the magnificent expanse of the lagoon which shimmered like a peacock's tail in violets, greens and blues, in which porpoise played and turtle leisurely paddled. He grew to hate the sunlight and the calm beauty of the changeful sea; there was in them a sublime and almost aggressive indifference to his own sufferings. The tranquillity of the lagoon was an insult, and he would turn away to trudge wearily over the burning sand that gave beneath his feet.

Once, when far away to the north cape, where the land rose in high, precipitous cliffs, he came upon a scene of which at most times he would have taken small notice, but which now deeply touched his imagination. Over the plateau of dead coral at the base of the cliff the rollers of the Pacific gathered and broke with tremendous force, sending their spray in clouds over the island to make rainbows with the sunshine.

On a ledge of rock about ten feet from the summit of the cliff stood a sheep. It stood mo-

tionless, its back close against the cliff, its eyes gazing out over the sea. Alone upon an upstanding pinnacle of rock perched an eagle, his gaze fixed on the far horizon, his body motionless as the crag upon which he sat. Sherwin knew that they were waiting for the end. The sheep had easily jumped down to the ledge upon which it now stood, but found it impossible to get back. It was waiting silently for its fate. Sherwin's instant desire was to save the sheep, but in a moment he realized that even if he were able to clamber down to the ledge of rock the poor beast would be more frightened of him than of the eagle, and would probably jump over into the sea. There was no way in which it could be saved. And after all why should he wish to save it? It was only a miserable, half-starved sheep, all skin and wool; the eagle had as good a right to it as any other; and yet he was annoyed that the eagle should sit there so cruelly waiting. He knew that when the sheep became exhausted from lack of food and water the great bird would drop silently upon its body and pick out its eyes and then tear at the bleeding eye-holes till it reached the brain. He waved his arm and shouted loud above the tumult of the waves. The eagle flapped its great wings and rose in circles high into the air, then, seeing that there was no real danger, re-

turned to its perch and continued its long vigil. Sherwin turned away annoyed at his own emotions. After all, it was only a common sheep; why should he be concerned about its fate? And yet at that moment he realized truths he had never before realized.

After walking a few yards he checked and stood in deep thought, looking at the waves as they flung themselves impetuously at the cliff. It seemed to him then that as they rose, gathered volume, curled over and fell in spray, they were speaking. It seemed as if they said that they were indifferent to his existence, indifferent to his new consciousness of them, that their motion was powerful and everlasting, while his was weak, crippled and easily broken, and that his emotions and thoughts were but spray flung off from waves of whose greatness he had never dreamed. He muttered to himself, cursing at the doctor and at the loneliness of the island. But it did not somehow enter his mind that he would throw over the whole of his present manner of life and return to civilization. He no longer thought of that mode of escape. It would need now some large external influence to disturb the even tenor of his ways.

## CHAPTER IV

OVER the calm expanse of a tropical sea a light, warm breeze blew, ruffling the waves and dappling the reflected moonlight. The stillness of a tropical night hung over the water and the blaze of the southern stars was only slightly dimmed by a crescent moon that cast its path of chequered reflections on a black and shining sea. Here and there in the dark hollows of the waves gleamed for an instant the phosphorescent form of some bell-shaped medusa. With a faint splash a flying fish would occasionally leap above the surface and flit, a thin and glimmering luminary, above the ripples. All was hushed in the calm beauty of the tropical night. Even the great liner that drove its way northward seemed to sit lightly on the water and be drawn forward by some magical force. The yellow reflections from the lighted port-holes and saloons fell changeful and irregular on the rounded billows that ran backward from the bows and stretched on either side like the barbs of some huge arrow.

On the boat all was quiet, save for the steady

throb of the engines and the rhythmical rushing of the water along the iron sides of the hull. Some of the passengers sat in groups about the deck, chatting and enjoying the stillness of the night, others were playing bridge in the smoking-room. The upper or boat-deck was empty, save for a young man who leant over the forward rail. From where he stood he looked down on the dark triangle of the fore-castle, that seemed held miraculously above the water that rushed by on either side. The wind blew easily through his thin silk clothes, and it gave him a keen pleasure to feel it touch every part of his body. For a time it amused him to follow with his eyes the streaming and incessant movements of the water, then he turned and watched the crew of Malays and Chinamen who sat in little groups on the for'castle deck. Some played cards, some talked in quick emphatic tones and some, like himself, idly watched the passage of the black and glittering sea.

Down on the lower deck amongst all those people he had felt cramped and stifled. Life was pushing too violently through his veins to allow him to suffer quietly the trite commonplaces of after-dinner conversation. The solemn and majestic quiet of the tropical night was too great a novelty to be let pass without tribute. Out there

in the yielding darkness he could conjure with all his imaginations and ambitions. Here he could push out into the spaciousness of life itself. It lay before him wide and hopeful. With a burning ardour for his work, a work that he had mastered and in which he knew himself to be efficient, he felt himself well equipped to enter and probe its mysteries.

At Victoria University Dr. Hicksey had been a brilliant student, had obtained scholarships and honours, and at the age of twenty-five had taken his doctor's degree. Later he had done research in tropical diseases and now had applied for permission to go to Kanna and Fenton Islands to study the condition of the sick natives. He looked forward to the fine opportunities that he would have; an open field for research, free from control. He would be able to do all the experiments he desired, he was free, entirely his own master, and thoroughly equipped for the enterprise. His work opened a vast unexplored country. There were high mountain ranges, with rough winds of inspiration blowing among their crests, and from the mountain tops there would be horizon beyond horizon stretching to the limit of human perception, and there one day his feet might be destined to walk. He was happy in the promising vision of his future, in the knowledge that he was young

and well equipped, and in the flattering belief that he was master of his own fate.

Gradually, as the ship urged forward through the dark water, there came into sight the lights of the distant port of Kaimera. At first they looked like a string of yellow sparks blown from a furnace, and slowly, very slowly, as the boat approached, they outlined the long length of the pier and showed in gleaming squares the windows of houses. The news that land was in sight spread quickly through the ship, and passengers and crew alike seemed to vibrate to a sudden stimulus.

The arrival in port after a long journey will touch the dullest traveller with a sense of excitement. The whole ship's company will leap from a kind of comatose doze into the keenest life and activity. Besides the fact that there are friends to be said good-bye to, and new friends to be met, there is always the sensation of discovery of new lands. But, apart from the feeling of the passengers, and the fact that the long monotony of the sea has been broken, the whole routine of the ship alters. The crew seem miraculously to increase in numbers, meals are served at irregular times, stewards scurry about the decks, and everyone is shaken, whether they will or no, out of the quiet and indolent mood of a sea-passage. And

then the crowd of strange people, who jostle on board as soon as the first gangway is lowered, bring with them a wave of excitement—the excitement of a crowd all touched by the same emotion; a sense of the mystery of the sea that is embodied in the ship, which comes with cargoes of strange goods, with messages from far cities, which is in itself a complex and teeming centre of human life.

The young doctor, who by this time had been joined by several other passengers on the upper deck, experienced that happy and tumultuous excitement that comes with the first touch of a new experience. This was his first entry into the tropics. He had unreasoning expectations that the land, the plants, and the beasts, yes, and the very dust of the earth, would be endowed with some indeterminate quality of sweetness and power. This was the threshold of a new life. As he now waited, surrounded by a number of eager faces, while the black length of a boat came slowly against the pier, life throbbed wonderfully in everything that he touched and saw. Every episode called to him to live thoroughly and to take what was so bountifully offered. The world was splendidly his own, he had only to take the good things that it presented.

At the end of the jetty there was already a

crowd assembled. For to the inhabitants of Kaimera the arrival of a mail-steamer was the event that broke the week's monotony. Everyone who could afford the time would go down by the train that ran out the three miles of jetty to the landing-place, and there wait to hurry on board the ship as soon as the gangways were down. Hicksey was one of the first passengers to win his way through this upward pushing stream of humanity. He was eager to be off that limited space of deck on which he had been confined for the last ten days. He walked along the side of the black hull and looked up at the white glare of the electric arc lamps used for unlading. At his back the jetty was packed high with iron-gripped packets of pressed wool; twenty-five thousand pounds' worth waiting for the next cargo steamer. He strolled to mid-ships and clambered into a nook three tiers high, on the wool-packets. Here, sheltered from the wind, he lay full length and watched the intense and varied life of the steamer. On the lower deck Chinese and Siamese sailors were hurrying to and fro carrying the white cloth mail-bags. White men in stiff india-rubber collars were standing here and there gossiping, and through the windows of the refreshment room he saw the filling of glasses. He watched the people hustling past one another, and saw the meeting of

a strong, fine-looking Malay and a young Siamese boy, with long hair and bare shoulders. The man for a moment laid a hand on the boy's throat and passed the fingers of his other hand through his black locks. The boy turned with a smile and a light musical laugh. He watched the man's eyes follow him out of sight. At the forward hatch the Chinese sailors were getting the donkey-engine started; above them an electric arclight flashed, now off, now on, irregularly lighting up their almost naked bodies. The upper deck was empty save for a respectably dressed Englishman who was engaged in an awkward flirtation with a young woman in a red jersey. All these varied manifestations of life delighted the young doctor. He was glad to feel that for the time at any rate he was free from all the worries and occupations of the town, that he was just a loafer upon a wharf, glad to witness such diverse evidences of vivid, sensuous life.

A whistle blew a five minutes' warning. The visitors began to leave the ship. A girl, one of his fellow-passengers, who stood by herself on the upper deck, saw Hicksey where he crouched on the wool-packets and waved her handkerchief. The wind blew her light garment about her; she stood fronting it as if to feel its close embrace, conscious of and enjoying every inch of her body.

He waved her an answering good-bye that had in it all the joy and none of the regret of departure, then jumped down amongst the crowd and shouldered his way toward the train.

## CHAPTER V

THE morning after his arrival in Kaimera Dr. Hicksey went in search of Mr. Pomfrey, the captain of the "Shark." He was told that the old man had his quarters at Flin's Hotel, a little drinking shanty on the beach. When he asked the host where Mr. Pomfrey was he was received with a silent stare, and then, after some moments of critical inspection, was told that Pomfrey was not yet up, and wasn't likely to be for some time.

Hicksey was all keenness to get across to the islands and was not to be put off. "What! is he still asleep at eleven o'clock?" he asked. "Where's his room?"

Again the man considered before he spoke. "His room's at the back, number seventeen. You can go through if you like. He's been drunk on and off for the last week; you won't get much change out of him."

Hicksey walked down a long passage and then came upon an open courtyard, round which were a number of jerry-built shanties, most of which had the glass broken in the windows and looked as

if they had not been cleaned since the day they were put up. He rapped on the door of number seventeen, but, getting no answer, pushed his way in. On a very dirty bed lay the old seaman in shirt and trousers. He was fast asleep, and his face was red and puffy. Hicksey shouted his name, but received no response; then he shook him, but could get nothing, not even a grunt, out of the sleeping man. After further efforts, all to no effect, he gave it up as useless. As he passed out through the bar the man laughed, asking what he had got out of the old chap. "You found him a bit raddled, did you? There's not much chance of you getting him to move for a week or more."

Hicksey walked back to his hotel in a hot wind-storm of driving dust. He was angry at this first failure and at the prospect of having to waste his time in so squalid and uninteresting a town.

Kaimera is not a very charming place. Like many other colonial towns it consists of rows of iron houses painted red brown, with white-washed roofs. The only green things that grow are the pepper trees planted in long lines in the streets, and here and there an agave. Behind the town are endless flats of desert scrub, across which the camel teams come, drawing huge wagons of wool from the interior. To the north there is a dried-up bed of a river, with here and there water-holes,

round which cluster a few trees—white gums and acacias. The sun beats down hot and straight, throwing a glare and shimmer of heat over everything. When the west wind blows it brings sand and heat off the desert, and the east wind comes laden with clouds of mosquitoes from the swamps.

For a man of Hicksey's character inactivity in such a place was intolerable; so in the afternoon he made another attempt on Flin's hotel. This time after severe punching and shaking he got the old man to grunt and sit up on his bed.

"Well, and what do you want, young man?" Mr. Pomfrey demanded, blinking at him with his bleared blue eyes.

"I want you to take me across in the 'Shark' to Fenton Island, as you have orders to do. I want to get away at once, and not stay here wasting my time while you sleep off your drunkenness."

"Yes, the 'Shark,' " growled the old man, and as if he had closed the discussion shut his eyes.

Hicksey shook him roughly. "Look here, I'm not going to stand this nonsense. You've got to take me across as you are under orders to do."

Mr. Pomfrey raised himself with a spark of annoyance. "Young man, who's in charge of the 'Shark,' you or I? I've got a lot of cargo to take aboard. I'll have to pole it out on a punt, and I

can't do it till a mate of mine comes back to help me."

"Is it a job that needs two men?" demanded Hicksey.

"Yes, I couldn't do it by myself."

"Well, I'll help you; we'll do it together."

"I don't think you could do that sort of job; it's a long wet job."

"Whatever it is, I'll do it. I want to get off to-morrow. I shall be round here at eight o'clock and shall expect to find you up. We'll tackle the work together. Where are these things you have to put aboard?"

"They're in a store-house at the back." Then the old sailor added with a chuckle: "Aren't you afraid of the water snakes?"

"I'm not afraid of anything except wasting my time. How many cases are there? I'll have a look at them, and, if necessary, get a man to help us load them."

"About a dozen or so."

"Very well, I'll see you in the morning," said Hicksey, and went out, leaving the old man to finish his sleep. He stopped in the bar for some minutes and reported his interview to the host, who was now less taciturn and seemed to take interest in the young man's direct manner of attack.

Then, to establish good feeling, Hicksey stood drinks all round, and ordered three bottles of the best brandy, saying that he expected to find Pomfrey sober the next morning.

The following day they had not very much difficulty in getting started. The punt, an enormously heavy vessel of wood, was dragged in close to the shore and provisions were piled on board. When she was fully loaded the two men began poling her out towards the "Shark," that lay anchored three-quarters of a mile from the shore. It was harder work than the doctor had anticipated, for the current kept turning the boat round, and she was a most unwieldy craft to manage. For an hour they worked hard, the work becoming more difficult as they got into deeper water. "We'd better get in and swim," suggested Pomfrey; "that is, if you aren't afraid of the water snakes, and I never yet knew them to bite anybody, though some do say they are very poisonous."

The water snakes were indeed very real creatures, and not, as the doctor had imagined, legendary animals. He had already seen two or three of them in the muddy water. They were bright yellow and black in colour and from four to eight feet long. There was, however, nothing for it but to follow Pomfrey's example and climb over the

edge. He kept on his silk trousers in a sort of unreasoning hope that they would prevent the snakes from biting, but the rest of his clothes he left in the punt. They swam one on each side, pushing the old boat in front. From that moment they began rather to like one another, and when on the way over the doctor showed no signs of sea-sickness, but took his turn at sailing, the old sailor forgave him his domineering manners of the previous day.

After a fair passage the "Shark" stood in towards the coast of Fenton Island as the sun sank behind her into the sea. The shadow of her sail, a blue patch upon the water, stretched far ahead of the little craft, and the line of the ragged cliffs reflected the sunlight and shone like red copper. The sand beaches blazed, a fringe of gold, and the waves, limpid and clear, enclosed within their hollows flitting lights of green and yellow amethyst. The men on the cutter had been silent for the last hour. They experienced in the blazing beauty of the tropical evening that delicate and rare poise between physical well-being and spiritual contentment. For the time they were content to live wholly in themselves, happy to feel the freedom of the sea, the sunshine, and the wind, and to know themselves more personally in touch with the primitive forces of life than when in the bustle and tumult of the town.

Hicksey was at the tiller steering for the mouth of the harbour. Now and then the boat bent herself to the wind and the water rippled more noisily under her keel. As they neared the moorings Pomfrey broke the silence:

"Do you think you can bring her up close to the buoy while I grab it with the hook?"

"Yes, I think I can manage," said Hicksey, as he looked keenly ahead.

"Stand ready to let go the jib when I tell you," shouted Pomfrey to the man Tony, who was his second in command and constituted the whole crew of the "Shark," being cook and man of odd jobs combined; a strange, silent being who never washed and who hardly ever went ashore. When unoccupied Tony would sit and watch the constant moving of the waves, and seemed to have outlived all ambition or desire.

"Let her go!" The jib fell and the boat swung close to the bobbing buoy.

"I see you know how to sail, sir," said the old man with enthusiasm. "Now pull in the mainsail."

In less than thirty seconds the boat was changed from a free live flying creature to a hull stripped bare and chained. The men had as suddenly sprung from their dreams back into active life, and now busied themselves in making things ship-

shape. When all was in order and the sails corded they sat down to wait the coming of the dinghy.

"Beautiful water here," said Pomfrey, looking into its clear depths. The boat was moored in about three fathoms, and the water was so clear that in the evening light the white sandy bottom, with here and there black patches of seaweed floating on it, was clearly visible.

"I think I shall have a bathe," said Hicksey. "I feel dirty from the water in the river."

"Are you not afraid of the sharks?"

"Ah, I wouldn't dive in here for anything," said Tony, full of apprehension. "I've seen as many as ten of them all swimming about this very place."

"If I don't think of the sharks, they won't think of me," said the doctor, as he stripped off his shirt.

Pomfrey chuckled at the young man. "Can you dive well?" he asked.

"Fairly well."

"Then come here, will you, for a minute. Do you see that round thing? That's an anchor I lost here about six weeks ago. Do you think you could bring it up?"

"Yes, I think I can. I'll try."

"Take a rope down and make it fast. You will find it too heavy to lift."

"All right. I'll just have a swim round first." The freshness of the water made him feel ready for any adventure. He shouted with delight as the cool, delicious stuff swirled about his limbs. Then, driving the breath out of his body, he struck down to the sea floor, found the anchor, and made fast the rope.

When once more he clambered over the edge of the cutter Tony regarded him as some one back from the dead, as a being hardly human. "I tell you I wouldn't have dived in there for ten pounds," he repeated.

This was the first of the reckless deeds that gave Hicksey the reputation of utter fearlessness. As Pomfrey often repeated: "He's afraid of nothing, that young man, except wasting his time. That's what he told me when I first met him, and that's truth."

In a few minutes the dinghy arrived, and Hicksey went on shore with Mr. James, a neat and rather smug-looking young man of twenty-one, who was medical assistant at the hospital. Mr. James had been a grammar school boy, who from his earliest youth had cherished the ambition of becoming a doctor. Unfortunately he was unable to pass any of his exams, and so was glad enough to accept a position of assistant and bottle-washer at the island hospital.

By the time they reached the beach the light had almost gone out of the sky. Just a few lines of red showed above the horizon. These were reflected in the shining wet sand and were caught on the crests of the mauve and deep blue ripples. Up the beach armies of yellow crabs, poised high on long legs, scuttled about, popping in and out of their holes. Dr. Hubbard had come down to the beach together with the two nurses. Hicksey introduced himself, and briefly explained the object of his visit, and presented his letters of introduction from the head of the aborigines department.

## CHAPTER VI

FROM the very first there was a natural antipathy between the two doctors. Hubbard felt instinctively that the keen, energetic-looking young man would disturb his quiet, the quiet of the island life that he was beginning to enjoy; for though he was constantly grumbling at his exile from civilization he had grown to love the slow and easy life. He loved the little house sheltered by the sand-hills, and the little room in which he and the two nurses and Mr. James took their meals. Often he would stand by the window and enjoy the view of the expanse of blue sea arched over by a brilliant sapphire sky. He loved his evening walks on the sands when the sea came lapping to his feet, while the dry scrub on the hill-tops turned from yellow to green and from green to mauve in the fading light. He loved his position of unquestioned and uncriticized authority, the weight that he felt his own words carried and the pleasant feeling that he could always hold forth without any fear of being contradicted. And now, suddenly and unexpectedly, was landed upon him this young man, who came straight from

a city hospital, and would probably hold modern ideas as regards cleanliness and new up-to-date theories.

The two men were physically and mentally of very different types. Hicksey, a wiry, nervous man, with a keen sensitiveness to life and a burning enthusiasm for his work, could never bring himself to respect the lazy, somewhat stout and easy-going, Hubbard.

As they walked up the beach together Hubbard was wondering how he could best manage to slip away and tidy up some of the grosser negligences before Hicksey saw over the wards.

At the evening meal there was a feeling of constraint over the whole party. The women were shy of the emphatic young man, who began the conversation on an altogether wrong note by asking questions of a medical character. Hubbard turned red and answered ponderously, trying to lead the conversation back to lines of conventional commonplace, and finally reminded him that the evening meal was a social gathering and not a time to discuss professional subjects. Hicksey's cheeks flushed with annoyance, and he did not speak for the remainder of the meal. He was full of a fresh, untried ardour for his profession and impetuous to get to work. Most of the night he spent in unpacking his microscope and instru-

ments, and in fitting up a room in which to work.

The hospital on Fenton Island was kept in better order than the rough ward on Kanna Island. There were two nurses always in attendance. These, though not properly trained in the strict sense of the word, had had a fair amount of experience and kept things moderately clean; and James, in his inexperienced and untaught way, was an enthusiast, and did his best to do what he considered the right thing. In spite of these efforts Hicksey found the place far below his standard of what a hospital should be, and in a very short time he had summed Hubbard up as an incompetent sluggard. He felt it almost as a personal affront that a man should make so little of a good position and fine opportunities. He kept his opinion, however, to himself, and was occupied most of the time with his own work. But in spite of his close application to his own interests it was not long before he found that he was an intruder in more ways than one.

The situation between the nurses and the two men was already delicate and strained, and he did not make things any easier by his presence. The two women, both a little *passé,* showed more than a motherly interest in James, who was flattered though a little embarrassed by their regard. They both also liked Hubbard for his easy-going

and pleasant geniality. But then they remembered that he was a married man, and, although at the back of their minds all manner of possible eventualities may have lurked, they had learnt from experience that it was not wise to disclose certain half-admitted thoughts. Hubbard, on his part, was fond of feminine adulation, and bid for his share. Each of the four watched the others narrowly, and all were careful not to commit themselves. Into this nicely balanced situation Hicksey came as an alien and disturbing force. What most annoyed the women was that he took no place in the figure, but remained a silent and, they guessed, a critical spectator. It was humiliating too that they had to admit that he was better-looking than Hubbard and more of a man than James; in fact, obviously a better catch, and yet he showed in neither of them the least interest. They found that his presence soon became irksome, and they combined in a tacit dislike and armed neutrality This soon developed into a warfare of hostile looks. Hicksey tried not to notice these, and believed that so long as he interested himself entirely in his work he could steer clear of any friction; but it was not long before there happened one of those small incidents that are the forerunners of a quarrel, and show discordant feelings beneath a calm exterior.

On a sultry hot day, when the sun blazed upon the iron roof of the hospital and the steamy atmosphere of the place was heavy with the smell of natives and iodoform, on such a day, when nerves are on the stretch and tempers are easily lost, Hicksey, in walking through one of the wards, happened to notice that Nurse Hilton did not take the trouble to dip the instruments used in the dressing of wounds into antiseptic before using them on the next patient He walked up close to her before she noticed that he was watching.

"Let me look at those instruments, nurse. You haven't sterilized them. Don't you know your business better than to do that sort of thing?"

"I beg your pardon, Dr. Hicksey, but I don't know whether that's any of your business. I'm working under Dr. Hubbard, and he doesn't wash his instruments every time, and I don't know why I should."

"Don't answer me in that tone; you know perfectly well that absolute cleanliness is essential. Dr. Hubbard, I am sure, would want you to be particular in that respect, and I shall certainly report you. Let me see you sterilize the things at once."

"You had much better mind your own business,

Dr. Hicksey," snapped the nurse, reddening with annoyance.

The young man made no reply but stood in silence and saw that she did what he had instructed. When he reported the case Hubbard hummed and ha'ed and said that little negligences of that sort would occur sometimes in the best hospitals, and that they all had a great deal of work to perform under very trying circumstances, and that it would be better if Dr Hicksey left it to him to find fault, as he was anxious not to upset the nurses in any way. He added that it would be better if Dr. Hicksey occupied himself exclusively with his own work. Hicksey took the rebuke in silence, but felt now all the more critical towards the management of the hospital.

After this little incident the relations between Hicksey and the other members of the staff became strained. The two women, who from the first had never liked him, were pointedly polite and kept up an attitude of armed neutrality, broken occasionally by a hostile look. Nurse Hilton had told Nurse Toms of the episode in the ward, and they had agreed that Dr. Hicksey was an unpleasant, meddling young man, and that it would have been far better if he had never come to the island. She also told James; and in

a very few days Hicksey found himself left much to his own resources. He despised and disliked Hubbard, and the two women waged against him a petty feminine warfare. James was the only person with whom he had much intercourse. This young man, in spite of Nurse Hilton, could not altogether dislike Hicksey. He recognized in him a fellow-enthusiast, and respected him for his obvious ability, realizing that here was a man willing and able to teach what he most wanted to know. Hicksey on his side was not much concerned about what the other thought. He was pleased by the novelty of the life on the island and was immensely interested in his work, and when not occupied with that would set off for solitary tramps. He was in perfect health and fitness, delighting in all physical exercise. He bathed twice every day, and while the others kept close to the shore, rarely going deeper than their waists, he would swim far out, quite indifferent to the sharks' fins that now and then jutted, black, evil-looking triangles, above the surface.

When one morning Dr. Hubbard announced that he was going to leave for a short visit to Kanna Island, Hicksey said that he wished to come too. The doctor was not pleased and would rather have left him at the hospital. He had not visited Kanna for six weeks, and he did not like

to think what state he would find the natives in or of Hicksey's white face of contempt and silent criticism, for though the young man now never made any remark about the management of the hospital, his silence was often more pointed and cutting than the most bitter speech. Hubbard had a vision of neglected and dirty natives, and already he felt the sharpness of Hicksey's silent contempt. He tried even to persuade him to stay and continue the work he had started, but Hicksey was not to be shaken off, saying that he wished particularly to come and see some of the men, and that he wished to have a work-room on both of the islands. Hubbard could raise no further objection. The young man had a perfect right to go. Then an idea struck him, that he might get Hicksey to stay on Kanna and tidy up the work that he had left undone, and in this way he would get rid of the fellow and establish once more the comfortable and friendly atmosphere that had existed at the hospital before the young doctor's arrival.

On the way over Hubbard talked considerably about the difficulties of running two places so far removed from one another, and hinted that he was overworked and consequently unable to keep both hospitals up to the standard that he desired. Hicksey was polite but taciturn; he had no wish

to make excuses easy for a lazy fellow. After a while they relapsed into silence, and the elder man began to hate him in his heart.

When they landed on the beach of Kanna Island they were met by an alarming figure; Sherwin, his red beard grown long and unkempt, his shirt open over his tanned and hairy chest, looked as wild as any native. Close behind him, moving as his shadow, was the faithful Coffee, his black limbs shining in the sunshine, naked save for a small twisted waist-cloth and a string of yellow shells round his neck. Sherwin's right hand was tied up in a thick clout of lint. He did not answer the doctor's hail, but stood at some little distance, till the two men had pulled up the dinghy on to the dry sand. Then, as fierce-looking as some monstrous and hairy animal, he strode towards Hubbard. All the exasperation and pain of the last weeks found outlet in a stream of oaths and invective.

When he paused for breath Hubbard fell back a pace and tried to recover himself and his dignity. "Come, come, my man, you mustn't speak to me like that. Remember, I'm dependent on this cutter. It isn't as if there were a steamship running between the islands."

Sherwin went off in a long angry laugh. "By God, Doctor, do you know you've left me alone

on this island for six infernal weeks, and now you talk of the cutter! It's the women, God damn you. When you're in hell you can think of what I've tasted; and the niggers go through hell too. Poor devils, they lie there with their eye-holes crawling all with maggots and no one to help them." As he continued he worked himself up and became even more angry. "It's not my job to do that sort of thing, and see what comes of it. In doing your work, just because I couldn't bear to see them suffering, I got some sort of poison into my hand. For three weeks it's been getting worse and worse. I couldn't sleep for the pain, couldn't sit down for it hardly. I had to keep walking up and down, walking up and down all the time. I tell you it's enough to send a man mad to be stranded alone on a place like this with nothing but black men and flies."

At the allusion to the fly-blown natives Hubbard had gone white to the lips. What on earth would Hicksey think! His mind was in a whirl of confusion, anger, and fear. Being a coward, he was more afraid than angry, mortally afraid of what he might find when he next went to the rough, inadequate hospital on the sand-dunes. He was angry too at being shown up so mercilessly before a colleague whose attitude towards him he knew to be critical and disparaging, and who now

stood by, silent and embarrassed, looking at the sand at his feet, and making in it fan-shaped patterns with the toe of his shoe, but all the while keenly taking in what was said.

For a moment the two men stood in silence facing one another. Hubbard felt he must speak or else that wild savage of a man might be provoked to strike him. "What's that you say about the natives getting fly-blown? It's impossible," he tried to bluster.

"If it wasn't for me they'd be a lot worse than they are. When there's no one here to look after them they are not likely to be able to look after themselves. But I'll thank you before you look at them to look at my arm first; it's in a pretty bad way I can tell you."

Hubbard was so scared that he was glad of any way of escape. "Very well, come up to my house and I'll look at it at once."

Sherwin was a little mollified. "It aches right up to my shoulder and down my side, and there's a swelling here." He indicated his arm-pit. "At times I haven't know how to bear myself."

When they got into the house and the bandages were removed, Hubbard, although he was shocked at the sight of the man's hand, tried to make light of the wound. "Ah, yes, I see you must have got a little blood-poisoning. It must be very painful.

But I'll soon get that right. I shall have to lance it, and then we must bathe it every day with some lotion I shall give you, and before long we'll have it much better." He chose to ignore and pretend that he had not noticed Sherwin's rudeness, and now talked in his most friendly manner. He joked and chatted and assured Sherwin that there was no need for anxiety. Sherwin was naturally cheered at having white men to talk to once again, and was heartened by the doctor's assurances and gradually became less surly, though he let it be seen that he still bore a grievance against Hubbard.

For the next few days the two doctors were kept busy. There was much work to be done, Hicksey found the men's ward in an incredibly filthy and neglected condition. He gave up his own work and set himself to help establish some sort of order and cleanliness. He made few comments, uttered no criticism, but his silence had an angular and uncomfortable significance that Hubbard found more intolerable than open censure. Every morning Sherwin came to the ward to watch the two men at work. He liked the look of Hicksey, but could not understand his reserve. Several times he tried to get into conversation, but was answered by monosyllables. This annoyed him, and he fell back on Hubbard for company, who was as genial

as ever and seemed very proud of himself on account of the efforts he was making. But it was impossible for Hubbard to keep for any length of time at regular work, and in a few days he had relapsed into his habits of indolence.

The three men were singularly ill-adapted to live together, cut off as they were from all civilization, from the social conscience of the race. That force holds men together, gives them their moral values, and sets them each working, whether they will or no, in the complex and intricate machine which, irrespective of their own desires, uses them for its peculiar ends, letting the fragments fall useless and worn out on to the great scrap heap which constitutes the history of a people. On the island each man felt in vain for his accustomed setting, and, finding it not, blamed the others. Here each must live to himself and grasp more strongly the strength that was still in him, cling to it, lean upon it, and if it were strong enough live by virtue of its endurance. Every morning the sun came up out of a clear and cloudless sky and blazed with an unpitying and avid glare upon the sand-dunes and scant vegetation. The sand became hot underfoot and the men's eyes were red and swollen. Every day the natives toiled, making useless roadways across the sand,

and Sherwin, morose and moody, superintended the work, and woe betide the man who shirked. Hicksey worked incessantly with a fanatical insistence, lived in his own thoughts and hopes of future fame, in a great ambition. Hubbard was the worst off of the three; he wrote much in his journal, sat idly on the verandah, and longed for a companion of his own class and temperament; sometimes he was frightened by a glimpse of his own isolation and weakness. Thus the days passed, followed by black nights and a heaven full of glittering stars; then the three men returned to their houses to be waited on by the silent savage who moved like a shadow, spoke little, noticed all, and marvelled at their isolation. And after those short nights followed once more the dull monotony of the days. The sun flung upon the islands its sheaf of burning rays, and every morning after a night of pain and anxiety Sherwin would ask eagerly about his hand, recount his symptoms, and beg for some assurance. And yet in spite of regular treatment, his hand became no better. The hope that had been kindled by the doctor's return died down and he became daily more savage and depressed. One morning when Hubbard was removing the bandages Hicksey happened to come into the room to fetch some instruments that he

had forgotten. Sherwin looked with distress and anxiety at the swollen and putrescent mass that had once been his finger.

"If you don't mind, doctor, I should like Dr. Hicksey to have a look at my hand; I should like to know what he thinks of it."

"Yes, certainly, show it to him," said Hubbard. He was a little embarrassed that Hicksey should see what a bad state the man's hand was in. Turning to the young man he added: "You see a nasty state of blood-poisoning; he can't expect to get well in a day or two, but I think my treatment has made it a little better."

Hicksey took the man's hand gently into his own, for two minutes he looked at it in silence. Then: "Do you feel that?"

"No."

"That?"

"No."

Then squeezing his arm: "Do you feel pain here?"

"Yes."

For a moment or two longer he looked at the sore finger, then let the hand go, turned and walked slowly to one of the shelves, found the things that he had come in search of, and walked without any comment out of the room. The two men had been watching his movements, expecting

every moment to see him come back and further investigate the wound. They could hardly believe that he should go out without a word; neither of them had suspected his intention, and now they were left looking with astonishment at the closed door.

All Sherwin's worst fears leapt in his breast; this was no doubt more serious than Hubbard had supposed. With a white and anxious face he regarded the flushed annoyance of the doctor. "What do you think he means by that?" he queried.

"I don't know what he means. He's a cantankerous beggar, full of moods. He can't take the trouble to be decently civil," complained Hubbard, exasperated to speaking out. "I wish he'd never come on to the islands."

Sherwin was occupied with purely personal thoughts. "I think he means my hand's pretty bad. I know it isn't getting any better." Then emphatically: "By G—— I'll make him speak"; and he made off after Hicksey.

Left alone in the room Hubbard was undecided whether he would follow or not. He knew that Hicksey's silence was meant as the severest criticism on his work. It was a deliberate insult. He knew too that Hicksey was very angry, and that if he followed there would be a crisis. He

walked up and down the room in indecision. No, he would keep out of it; better that he stayed where he was, at any rate for a minute or two, then perhaps later he might go and see what had happened. He sat down and thought about the situation. No doubt the hand was pretty bad, and it was getting better very slowly. But damn that young fellow with his interfering, superior ways. For his own dignity he must go and see what was happening.

Hicksey was just outside the hospital when Sherwin overtook him. "For the love of God, doctor, tell me what is the matter with my hand."

Hicksey regarded the great burly figure of the man whose soul, in such dire distress, looked entreatingly from his eyes. For a few moments he seemed nervous and embarrassed, and his white face twitched; then in words he found an outlet for the force of his controlled indignation. He spoke deliberately, and, as was his habit, slowly, every word bitten off clean. "The same thing is the matter with your finger as is the matter with the whole island, with the hospital and everything in it."

Sherwin looked frightened. "You mean he is not treating it the right way?"

Hicksey suddenly flared out: "How do you expect a damned incompetent sluggard to treat any-

thing the right way? It gets worse every day, and he dabs it with antiseptic and calls that treatment. Your finger's past saving. If you don't have it off at once you may lose your hand."

Sherwin's usually red face had turned to a pallid pink, which made an unpleasant contrast with his ginger beard. For a while he gulped as if something had stuck in his throat. "Is there nothing else that can be done?" Then he added almost pathetically: "It's the first finger of my right hand and I don't want to lose it."

"You ought to have had it off a week ago; it could have come off then at the second joint, now it will have to be taken right back to the hand."

Just as the savage who has been bitten by a poisonous snake says that he has been scratched by a thorn, and as the consumptive assures one that he has only a cold, so Sherwin tried to disbelieve that he must lose his first finger on his right hand. He could not so quickly realize his ill-fortune, but stood as if stupefied by a blow, looking silent and puzzled at the sand at his feet.

At that moment Hubbard appeared, walking leisurely over the dunes. As he approached he tried to seem at ease. "Well, what has Dr. Hicksey to say to the case?"

Sherwin looked up fiercely as if at last realizing the necessities of the moment. He walked to

Hubbard, then roared at him: "He says I've got to have my finger off. Says I've got to lose my finger because you've neglected your work. If that's so, by God, I'll have the law on you; I'll make you pay for this."

Hubbard was one of those inconsiderable people, who when frightened try to escape by bluster. He got very red and tried to shout Sherwin down. "How dare you speak to me like that? How dare you? I dismiss you at once. Do you hear, I won't have you on the island. I dismiss you."

Sherwin stepped forward and the doctor stepped back quickly out of reach of the sound left hand that was ominously clenched, and called out in alarm: "Dr. Hicksey, will you please explain things. What is this nonsense about having his finger off? It is not as bad as all that. It was three weeks getting into a bad state, and I can't be expected to put it right in a few hours. Surely you can't seriously think that an operation is necessary?"

Hicksey had no particular desire to help the doctor, and had no inclination to speak anything but the truth. "Unless he has his finger off in the next day or two, he will lose his hand. The sooner he has it off the better. He ought to have been operated on a week ago."

For some seconds there was silence while the

facts of the situation made themselves felt. Hubbard expostulated. "But I consider an operation absolutely unnecessary. I refuse to have anything to do with it." Then suddenly, seeing a way of escape, he flared out at Hicksey. "Dr. Hicksey, I consider you responsible for the whole of this unnecessary scene. You have always set yourself in opposition to me and have set yourself in antagonism throughout. I shall report your conduct at headquarters. If the man is fool enough to take your advice then you must take the whole responsibility. If you choose needlesly to mutilate him, do so at your own risk."

Sherwin was dumbfounded. Here were these two men making a professional quarrel of what had been for him the pain and agony of the last month. For a moment he hated them both for their callous indifference. But one of them was right—which was he to trust? For only an instant did he hesitate, then he knew that Hicksey was the better man. "Dr. Hicksey," he said, "I'll take your word for it. I'd sooner have my finger off than risk the losing of my hand. I've had this pain for three weeks up my arm and down my side; anything to be rid of it." Then, infuriated at the thought of his loss, he turned to Hubbard: "If I had my hands I'd break you; I'd make you pay for this."

Hicksey cut him short: "Don't waste your time in threats." He gave a short laugh and kicked savagely at the sand as though to emphasize his joke. "You had far better ask Dr. Hubbard to give you chloroform; you'll need his help at the operation."

This remark seemed to enrage Hubbard more than anything else. "I will have nothing whatever to do with the operation. You act against my order, against my advice. Do your own butcher's work." He strode away blustering with indignation.

In the afternoon the operation was performed. Dr. Hicksey gave Sherwin a gag to bite on and did the best he could to allay pain with local anæsthetics. He was fairly pleased with his work and assured Sherwin that he would soon recover.

That evening at supper both doctors chose to ignore the events of the day, and although Hubbard felt sore and outraged, and Hicksey was furious at the elder man's behaviour, they were both civil to one another, recognizing the necessity of having to live together and of hiding from the natives the fact that there was between them any ill-feeling. The knowledge that they were bound to this strained civility made them hate each other the more, and as the surface waves of their disturbed emotions sank to rest, the accustomed

monotony settled upon the island. Both men were careful that there should be no occasion for further friction, and each lived to himself a life of his own thoughts. Sherwin's hand got steadily better, and as it healed his spirits rose and he began once again to joke with the natives and domineer over the faithful Coffee. He took again to his evening drink of Kava, though he was careful not to let the other white men know of this. He was not sure what they might think of him for taking to a native drink.

About ten days after the operation the two doctors left the island. Hubbard had hoped that Hicksey might be persuaded to stay on Kanna, but no, he said that there were cases he wished to return to at the hospital, and that he would go back. Hubbard could make no objections, and so once more in silent antagonism they set out on the return journey.

As the "Shark" bore them away towards Fenton Island, and the white triangle of the sail now and then threw back a reflection, Sherwin stood upon the high sand hill between the two houses and watched it become smaller and finally disappear. He was glad that the two doctors were gone. He had come lately to dislike and despise Hubbard—yes, and he disliked Hicksey, though he respected him. He would like to have had

him as a friend, but there was something in Hicksey that rejected this friendly feeling and so Sherwin experienced an instinctive and unreasoning antagonism. Now he was glad to be alone once again and to renew the comfortable and independent life of the early days.

As he looked round he saw stretching beneath him the island of bays and headlands, of thickets and sweeping sand-dunes, and there, away in the distance, was the native hospital and the men to whom his word was law. He was once more master of all that he surveyed.

## CHAPTER VII

IT is a noteworthy fact about human nature, that it is easier for one man than for two to bear isolation. It is still more difficult for four or five. As the slow weeks of heat and monotony passed over Fenton Island the members of the white settlement found it more and more difficult to tolerate one another, and the position gradually defined itself into a deliberate plot to get rid of the young doctor, to make things so unpleasant for him that he would have to go. There were five white people, compelled by circumstance to meet every day, and there was one too many. The campaign was led by the women. They hated Hicksey, partly because he took little notice of them, and partly because he was obviously a superior human being to the two men whom they did like.

Hubbard had told them his version of the incident of Sherwin's finger and they were righteously indignant. Oh, yes, if he was so keen on cutting up monkeys and other animals, no doubt he was glad enough to have an opportunity to cut up a man. These things were not said in his

hearing, but whispered, and all helped to increase the feeling that he was an intruder. What had been in the past a passive dislike now became an active warfare. Hubbard just kept within the bounds of politeness, and the nurses, whenever they got an opportunity, made provoking and insolent remarks. James alone was civil; he rather liked Hicksey, admitted frankly that he was his superior in knowledge, and he would like to have been on friendly terms.

Although Hicksey did not much mind the isolation, the constant pin-pricks were an annoyance. He despised Hubbard more than ever for letting the women fight his battles. He saw what they were aiming at, and since he had no intention of leaving the islands, was particularly careful to keep control of his temper. No one got much pleasure out of the persecution, but it afforded something to talk about.

These people, cut off as they were from the amusements and interests of civilization, might have found, had they had the imagination, a quality of wonder in the ever-changing tropical life of the island.

As it was, they found it more to their minds to amuse themselves by trying in a petty and malicious way to exasperate Dr. Hicksey. What perhaps made them at this time particularly sensi-

tive was that since Dr. Hubbard had returned he had spent much of his time in company with Nurse Toms, no doubt obtaining sympathy and consolation. By this the sensitive balance of the situation was disturbed, and Nurse Hilton benefited by the occasion to get engaged to James. Each woman resented the behaviour of the other, and the attitude of mutual vigilance was never abandoned. In a kind of desperate self-vindication they assumed a pose of ferocious virginity, which somewhere in the depths of their hearts they felt to be artificial and ludicrous. It was galling enough to find themselves in such a situation, unable to escape from their immediate surroundings and cut off from all the rest of mankind, but that Hicksey should remain untouched and free to criticize, exasperated them to the utmost. Their resentment naturally turned against him, and as time passed the situation daily became less tolerable. One hot windy day it came suddenly to a head and brought more serious consequences than any one had anticipated.

The party were at lunch, and Dr: Hubbard had just received a letter from Mr. Keynes, the head of the aborigines department, saying that he was coming for a short visit to the island, and that he hoped to see both doctors and to receive reports on the work upon which they were engaged.

Both of the nurses looked significantly at Hicksey. "I expect he will be very interested in your experiments, Dr. Hicksey," said Nurse Hilton. "I daresay in Kingstown they know nothing about your having animals here for vivisection. No doubt Mr. Keynes will be interested with an account of your experiments."

Hubbard laughed and said in a facetious way: "Ah, these young enthusiasts! They are not always content with experimenting on animals. They like to have a human being to cut up every now and then."

This open insult, coming on top of the pinpricks and annoyances of the last month, was too much for Hicksey. He stood up in his place, white and trembling with suppressed rage; his hands played nervously on the back of his chair: "Dr. Hubbard, I should like to see you outside, please."

"Come, come, that was only a joke; there is no reason to get so excited."

"There is this reason, that I do not choose to be insulted by a man who is a disgrace to the profession that he follows."

Hubbard turned crimson and jumped up, pushing his chair back. It fell with a crash. "How dare you speak to me like that, Sir?"

"Because I've just asked you to come on to the verandah."

The two men were now equally angry. They faced each other across the table, and the nurses looked on surprised and rather scared. James made some feeble protest which passed unnoticed. They were all excited and rather pleased at the turn things had taken, and were possessed by that inevitable desire of all human beings to witness a fight. The women were glad that the little whipper-snapper was to be taught a lesson. They hoped Hubbard would give him a thorough drubbing.

Hubbard was in appearance far the larger and stronger man, and as he led the way out he looked so considerably the more powerful that there seemed little doubt of the issue. He walked to the other end of the verandah and took off his coat. Hicksey did not remove his, but waited till the other should be ready. He was vaguely conscious of the brilliant white glare of the sand, of a metallic taste in his mouth and of the women pushing behind him to get a better view.

No one knew quite what happened, least of all Hubbard, who was expecting the attack of an English gentleman in a sparring match; but such refined conventions had been left far behind with

the rest of the paraphernalia of civilization. For two months those five people had been living together confined on one small island. One of them was superfluous, and he knew it, the others wanted him away. In a slightly more primitive society his death would have been assured; as it was they had done all they could to make his life intolerable, and now, as they all gathered under the heat-stricken roof of the verandah, they knew that the savage in each of them was close under the surface waiting to show himself. They all knew that he was there. Hicksey felt the primitive danger, and his primitive instinct responded, turning the conflict into a fight of life and death. Before any one knew what had happened Hicksey had rushed in and driven his knee into Hubbard's stomach and had leapt upon him with all the accumulated fury of the last few weeks. Down they went, Hubbard underneath, Hicksey with both hands at his throat trying to choke the life out of him and bumping his head up and down on the boards of the floor. Hubbard was purple in the face and choking for life. Both nurses screamed and rushed to the rescue. They flung themselves on Hicksey, tore at his hair, scratched at his eyes, and one bit the fingers tightened on the doctor's throat. At last, with James' help, they managed to pull him off,

and only just in time, for Hubbard was nearly choked, and lay for some minutes on the ground gasping for breath. Hicksey, scratched and bleeding, had been thrown back against the side of the verandah. He clutched at the rail with a shaking hand now and then giving curious little whimpers of emotion. James stood over the body of the fallen man, with one hand he restrained Nurse Hilton who with excitement would have sprung at Hicksey. The muscles of her cheeks twitched like the twisted knots in a taut rope, and she panted inarticulate abuse. Nurse Toms had sunk to the ground and was shaken with sobs. In all these people something extraordinarily powerful and fundamental had suddenly leapt to the surface. It had been free for a moment, now it was again restrained, yet it still clamoured and screamed for its proper food. It shook and tore at the frail prison of flesh in which it was contained. A very real part of human nature that had lived deep down, hidden in some dungeon, had surprised and appalled them by its fierce lust for freedom, and now shook them with shame and fear at its immense strength. And yet it was restrained by some bond, by some fragment perhaps of conscience that remained, a vestige of the civilization amongst which they had once lived. As their eyes met, that force, whatever it was, told

them that the beast must be pushed back. Shame pushed it back into its dungeon. It returned, grumbling and discontented, to abide in patience its proper time. James was the first to recover himself; he stepped towards Hicksey. "Dr. Hicksey," he said, "you had better come with me to your room and wash yourself." Then, turning to the nurses, "Will you please look after Dr. Hubbard and see that he is properly cared for." He took Hicksey's arm and walked him off the verandah.

Now that the rage of conflict and passion of slaughter had become stilled, Hicksey felt an imperative desire to justify himself. Someone would surely understand how much he had had to put up with. The women didn't count, they of course would be hostile; he didn't wish them to understand, but James, who did, as he knew, care for his work, must of necessity sympathize, and at that moment he passionately needed sympathy In a voice that was almost pleading he poured out his grievance. "Tell me, didn't he deserve a thrashing? Most of the time that I've been here I've been kept from my proper work doing the work that he is too incompetent and lazy to perform. I have worked while he stood idle, and all the while he has hated me and sneered at me. I saved Sherwin's hand, when in another week he would have

lost his arm, and now the fool insults my work, a thing that he has never understood, a thing he could never understand. He pretends that I am just a wanton experimenter and sneers at what he has no right to speak about." He was worked up to a further burst of indignation; he seized the young man's arm and shouted: "I tell you I am glad to have thrashed him." James was embarrassed at his vehemence, and was a little afraid that he might again attack Hubbard, who with the help of the two women was struggling to his feet. "Come to your room, doctor, come to your room and we will talk things over there."

After Hicksey had plunged his head into water and washed and dried himself, he looked once more the well-controlled and civilized man who had come to the island. His eyes alone, shining with intense excitement, betrayed the tumult of his feelings.

He made no other allusion to the events of the afternoon, but only asked: "How long is it before Mr. Keynes comes? Hubbard spoke of him as coming in a day or two, I think?"

"Yes, I believe he is expected to-morrow or the next day."

"I am glad he is coming"; then, after a short pause, "Tell Dr. Hubbard that for the next few days I will have my meals brought to me in my

room. I think it is better that we should not meet."

The next few days were indeed trying ones for Hicksey. He felt that everyone's hand was against him, and even James, who had, until now, stood in with him, did not conceal that he was horrified and shocked at the savagery of his attack. There was something about it un-English that outraged the young man.

It was obvious to Hicksey that he was certain to be dismissed from the island and that all his work and the fine opportunities he had for future work would be wasted; and wasted, he thought with exasperation, on account of that lazy and despicable weakling, whose existence had no right to influence a thing so important and dignified as his own career. Well, now that he was committed by what had happened he would make no effort to save himself, but would wait in solitude, and, so far as he could manage, in indifference till he received his dismissal. But how could he be indifferent when such prospects and opportunities for work were to be snatched away? Then again he would fall into the revolving circle of his thought and curse at Hubbard, hating him not so much for his personal affronts, as because, with his genial stupidity and incompetence, he stood in the way of a life better than his own and disgraced the profession that he followed.

When Mr. Keynes arrived on the "Shark," Hicksey did not go down with the others to meet him, but waited in his room, determined in no way to plead for himself.

Mr. Keynes, who was head of the aborigines department, and who was responsible for the founding of the hospitals, was an idealist in spite of the experiences of a fairly long and very varied life. He was the sort of idealist who tries to put his ideas into practice, has great faith in mankind because he has good reason to have great faith in himself. He was a man of fifty years, who had made a way for himself by virtue of his intelligence and power. He had followed several arduous and dangerous trades, had lived always close to the earth, and had drawn from it inspiration for his numerous schemes and a great faith in the future of his country, that young country that had given him birth, and in whose service he had spent the best years of his life. In his youth he had been an "overlander," and had taken cattle long journeys across country from one settlement to another; then he had been surveyor for the Government, then for three years had led an expedition across the interior, making a stock-route and sinking wells where there had been nothing but desert sand and wind-swept clumps of spinifex. Now he had risen to power, was a member of Parlia-

ment, and had schemes for improving the natives amongst whom he had spent so much of his life and whom he had come to like and respect. He had dreams of making them into a useful and self-reliant people. What he now wanted was serviceable men who would carry out his schemes and who could be trusted to do their work.

It was late in the evening when he knocked at Hicksey's door. He had spent all the afternoon with Hubbard and had heard all his complaints against the young man. He had listened in his quiet way, nodding his head from time to time to the doctor's petulant request that Hicksey should be instantly dismissed from the islands. Now he was going to hear what was to be said on the other side.

Hicksey opened the door to him.

"Good evening, Dr. Hicksey. I should like to have a talk with you; will you come for a walk with me along the beach?"

Hicksey assented; he asked Keynes to come in while he put in order the things at which he had been working. Keynes was pleased at the orderly, business-like look of the room, and Hicksey saw that there he had a man to deal with whom he could respect and like. They were silent as they walked over the dunes, and it was not till they

reached the flat expanse of yellow sand that Keynes spoke.

"I hear you two doctors have not been able to hit it off very well. There's some story of a fight. Hubbard tells me you tried to murder him on the verandah. It's a pity that two white men, and educated men too, who should work together and back each other up, should behave in that way."

Hicksey spoke deliberately and rather slowly. He did not wish to appear excitable or nervous. "Yes, I lost my temper; there are some things I cannot endure."

"Hubbard tells me that there was some quarrel about this man Sherwin. He tells me that you operated against his instructions and advice."

"If I had not operated the man would have lost his hand. It was shameful neglect to let it get to that state; but when I saw him there was nothing to be done short of an operation. And then Hubbard had the insincerity to insinuate that I had taken the man's finger off for the fun of the experiment."

"What do you mean by neglected?"

"Have you been over the hospital?"

"Yes."

"Well, things were worse than that—so much worse, that if you had not seen you would find it hard to believe. When I first went over to

Kanna Island I found four of the natives fly-blown, and they would have been worse if it hadn't been for Sherwin, who had been doing the doctor's work. Hubbard hadn't been over there for six weeks. Ever since then I have been doing his work, whereas I should have had the time for my own research."

"Perhaps it would have been better if you had stuck to your own work," said Keynes, looking sideways at his man.

Hicksey fell easily into the little trap. "I couldn't stand by and see things so badly done, and as for Sherwin, he would have lost his hand if I hadn't operated at once" For a short while they walked along the beach in silence. Then Keynes said in his even voice: "I suppose you guess that Hubbard threatens to resign unless I order you to leave the island?"

"I don't blame him, I would do the same in his place."

Keynes, as one well accustomed to judge of men and situations, had not taken long to form an opinion of the two doctors. It was not difficult for him to recognize a fellow-enthusiast. His next remark came as a surprise to Hicksey. "Now supposing that Dr. Hubbard were to resign, would you be prepared to take over the management of the two hospitals?"

It took Hicksey a moment to answer. "Would you really give me the work?"

"Do you think you could manage it? You would have to control your temper and re-establish good feeling."

"To do it well I should want two conditions. The first is, that I should want a properly trained nurse as matron under me. Someone to direct and teach the two women who are already here. The second is, that I should have a boat that I myself could sail between the two islands. At present we are altogether dependent on the pleasure of Mr. Pomfrey, who is an old fellow, difficult to hurry, and over whom I could have no real control."

"As to the boat, that's fairly easily settled and seems reasonable enough; I could have one sent over from Kaimera."

Hicksey was pleased and excited at the prospect. He cut in: "I only want quite a small boat—half-decked, cutter-rigged, the sort of thing I can sail by myself."

"Yes, we can manage that," Keynes went on; "but the other is more difficult. You don't find women keen after a lonely job of this sort. I consider myself lucky to have got the two young women who are here already. I tried a year ago to get a properly trained nurse but no one would

come. They can all get more congenial work, and the better pay doesn't tempt them. There was only one well-trained nurse that I could hear of, and there was some scandal connected with her; she seems to have got a bad name, and so finds it difficult to find employment. A Miss Desmond—I would have engaged her, but Hubbard objected."

"Is she good at her work?" asked Hicksey.

"Oh, there is nothing against that; I believe she is a very good nurse indeed."

"Then, if she's good at her work I don't mind about anything else, I can look after myself," said Hicksey with conviction.

"If you take this post, I shall expect you to stay for at least a year. Do you accept it on those conditions?"

Hicksey's pleasure at the unexpected turn things had taken could no longer be restrained. "It's very good of you, Mr. Keynes, to give me so fine an opportunity. I'll do the best I can."

Keynes was no doubt pleased at the young man's enthusiasm, but he answered in his even, unemotional voice: "Well, I hope you will make a good job of it. I rather think you are the man I've been looking for. When I put Hubbard in I thought he wasn't the right man for the place, but I couldn't just then get anybody else. Not that I think Hubbard a bad fellow, but he's not the sort

of man for pioneer work. There is no one who has a bad word to say of him, and that's partly what makes me think he is too easy-going. These islands want a man with initiative and a man who is prepared to work hard."

They had turned by this time and were walking back in the quickly fading light. The stars were already shining, and the bushes on the sand-dunes, silhouetted against a grey-pearl sky, looked like hunched creatures waiting to spring. "I am going away in the 'Shark' the day after to-morrow," continued Keynes; "as soon as I leave, you are in charge of everything on the islands, but until then I should advise you not to show up. The situation will be difficult and you had better leave it to me. You will have your difficulties with the two women, with whom you do not seem very popular. It is your business as soon as I have gone"—and Keynes said this with emphasis—"to smooth away all this bad feeling. Remember, it will be for you and not for them to make the first steps."

Hicksey assured him that he would do his best. As they walked back they talked of Keynes' schemes for the development of the hospitals, and Hicksey was pleased to find an intelligent and understanding interest taken in his own work. It was dark before they reached the house. They

shook hands with a firm grasp. "Good-bye, and good luck," said Keynes. "I will put things straight with Hubbard, but remember it falls to you to establish good feeling with the others. For neither of us will it be very easy."

"I will do my best," said Hicksey; "good-bye, and thank you."

## CHAPTER VIII

TWO months later Hicksey's rule was well established. The hospitals on both islands were run on up-to-date and thorough lines, the wards looked well scrubbed and clean, and the patients were washed and cared for. The new matron had proved to be a trained and thoroughly capable woman.

When Hicksey, in his new capacity of chief, had visited Sherwin he had suggested to him that he should become definitely employed as assistant at the Kanna Island hospital and receive extra pay for his services. He saw that Sherwin was capable and well able to be taught, and since he was a man of initiative he would be useful to have as permanent assistant. Sherwin had readily agreed to this suggestion and entertained, for a short while, the hope, now that he and the doctor were working at the same job, that their relations might become more friendly and intimate. But in this he was disappointed for Hicksey never showed any willingness to make friends, nor did he let Sherwin forget for a moment that there was a big

gap between them, constituted by their difference in education and birth.

Hicksey had stayed for a fortnight, and had instructed him in his new duties, and all had gone smoothly between the two men, in spite of Sherwin's growing annoyance and disappointment. Hicksey had then hurried back to Fenton Island to receive the new matron. He particularly wanted to be there when she arrived, and not to expose her to a reception from the two nurses, who both, in some miraculous way, had become acquainted with the scandal connected with her name, and who, he doubted not, would receive her with pettiness and jealousy.

Before Keynes had left, taking Dr. Hubbard away with him on the "Shark," he had spoken to the two young women and given them some severe and kindly advice. They were both very fluttered and excited at being seriously talked to by a man so high up in public affairs, and decided to give Hicksey another chance, and, in view of the fact that Hubbard would no longer be on the island, this they felt would not be very difficult. There was besides some instinct of their sex which prompted them to be friendly with their new chief. Their feelings towards the new matron were not so simple. Instinctively they resented the advent of another woman into their small circle, and then

there was the galling thought that she was to be set in authority. They were going to be perfectly polite and amenable, but then they knew (and they were going to let her know) that there was just something about her that was not quite right, and that she had had difficulty in getting a position elsewhere.

It was perhaps a good thing that Hicksey had come back in time to receive her. He had met her on the beach, and the next day had shown her over the hospital and talked over the work. In all this he showed a friendly formality, that he hoped would be difficult to break through He felt that he must be very careful, knowing that the nurses would be eager to seize on the first opportunity for gossip.

Nurse Desmond was a good-looking woman of thirty-seven, well-built and strong, with good dark hair and a pale face, a smooth wax-like brow, and dark, arched eyebrows. She spoke in a low-pitched voice that was almost a whisper. This was a strange contrast to her general appearance and upright bearing. On the way over she talked with old Mr. Pomfrey and heard stories of the young doctor who was so reckless about bathing among the sharks, who had had a row with Dr. Hubbard, had fought with him, and nearly killed him, and who had now been put in command of

the hospitals and was managing them in an altogether new and superior manner. "Ah, he's a fine young man," Pomfrey concluded. "Mr. Keynes was pleased enough, I can guess, to get him on the work instead of Dr. Hubbard." Here was material sufficient to touch a woman's imagination.

When sne first saw the doctor, she was disappointed. He was too slight and too bony for the man she had imagined, but yet she liked him, and this liking and approval grew as the days passed in which they worked together at the hospital. As workmen they were both thoroughly efficient, and in this they respected one another. If Hicksey were doing any difficult operation he would always ask Nurse Desmond to help rather than either of the others, and she always came up to his expectations. In the course of their work they were necessarily brought a great deal into contact, and Hicksey, burning with an enthusiasm for his profession, was glad to find someone besides James to whom he could talk. In Nurse Desmond he found an intelligent listener. She would listen silently, receptive, and sympathetic, and he would be tempted to pour out, in spite of the doubt that this might be beyond her comprehension, an account of his ideas regarding his own special research.

In proportion as Nurse Desmond pleased Hicksey and received so much of his confidence, she failed to please the two women. They were convinced that she was making what they called "a set" at the doctor, and it was obvious to them that he liked her and found her a good deal more interesting than he had found either of them. This could not be forgiven. They became very critical and chose to remember and enlarge the rumours that they had heard. It was impossible for these five people to refrain from discussing each other. Nurse Hilton naturally had her confidences with her young man, and her consciousness of the matron's physical superiority made her all the more eager in the little criticisms that human beings love to make at the expense of their fellows. Nurse Toms felt herself equally indignant, and the two women combined in resenting Alice Desmond's presence and priding themselves on some remarkable quality that they both possessed. If they had been asked what the quality was they would have found it difficult to answer, but since neither of them was concerned with introspective questions they were content to believe themselves superior and in a position that justified criticism.

The effect of such an attitude was to leave the others very much to their own resources. To the doctor this was a matter of small consequence, but

to Nurse Desmond it was more serious. She felt herself cut off from the sympathy of the other women, and she found it impossible to stand alone. She needed some centre around which to form her life. Instinctively she drew towards Hicksey, but found him, except when he was talking of his work, formal and difficult to approach. She tried to believe that the importance of his work was sufficient to justify the loneliness of her existence. And all the while she was haunted and reproached by the thought of her past life; she had made too great a sacrifice, she had broken too rashly the conventions of society and followed too confidently the promptings of her vigorous instinct She had lived through her ordeal and had left behind all that she believed was life, and from that burning had only carried away ashes that she believed to be dead and cold. Now on the desert island, far from the scenes of her former life, there rose from them into the still air of solitude a thin coil of smoke, and once again hidden embers began to glow, waiting only for some breeze to fan them to flame. No, she could never go back to the shelter of society. People would never allow her to forget. She was an outcast. These other women never let her forget that, and now what matter what they thought? They would be mean and petty however she behaved.

Her want of comradeship and sympathy was the strongest of her needs, but besides this there was the inevitable sex antagonism. Hicksey's cold and remote bearing was a challenge, and consciously or not it was her task to break down the barrier that he so rigidly upheld. Every day they met in the hospital; they had their work and interests in common and found much to talk over, and three times every day they sat opposite each other at their meals.

If Nurse Desmond could not be described as a beautiful woman, she was most certainly a woman of definite charm. Her dark abundant hair and pallid skin made a striking contrast to her blue eyes, and then her soft and unexpectedly low-pitched voice made one stop and listen attentively to catch what she was saying.

Hicksey felt the charm but was determined to resist. It needed all his resolution. She in no way committed herself, but he felt her presence whenever she entered the room. His eyes would involuntarily follow the movements of her bare white arms, the folds of her skirt, and the poise of her body as she moved. One evening he happened to stay late in his surgery looking over a series of slides that he had just made, when Nurse Desmond came in to ask some question. He answered her abruptly and went on with his work,

Instead of leaving the room, as he expected, she occupied herself with arranging on the shelves some of the things that were out of place. He was on the point of telling her not to trouble, when he suddenly realized that the very fact of his speaking would in itself be an admission that he was conscious of a strained relationship; it was just this that even to himself he did not wish to admit. He kept silent.

When the shelves were tidied, instead of leaving the room she took a chair and sat down in a far corner occupying herself with the rolling of lint bandages. With half a glance Hicksey ascertained what she was doing; he was surprised and annoyingly excited. He tried hard to interest himself in the slides, but could not forget the woman sitting behind him silent, and as he believed, watchful. For half an hour he worked on, moved slide after slide under the eye-piece, mechanically turning the screw of the fine adjustment, but through his mind were racing figures far different from those his eye looked at. What did the woman want? he asked himself, and left the question unanswered. How he wished he had spoken to her when she first began tidying the shelves—now it was impossible. He felt the silence become active and hammer with insistence at his temples so that all his thoughts were scat-

tered. All that was left was the escape offered by his work. He tried to concentrate on the slide in front of him. He noticed that inadvertently he had screwed the objective down till it had touched and cracked the cover slip. Then a clear conviction swept all other thoughts far away. He knew that if he took four steps across the room towards her she would rise and stand in front of him white and trembling, that she would stretch out her hands, that he would take them. He thought of the pale softness of her neck, of the rich loops of sweet-scented hair that covered her ears, of her white throat and head thrown back. He looked blankly at the shining disk of the eye-piece, then at his fingers that he saw were trembling. Quickly he rose and tumbled the slides into their cases, then, without looking at her, strode across the room and out into the fading twilight.

The sand, pale violet and mauve, stretched in undulating waves on either side and clung to the high banks of the dunes. Here and there yellow flowers and grass looked surprisingly bright. Beyond the sand-hills he saw the wet shining line of the beach, and beyond that the opaque deep blue of the evening sea. He walked with long strides between the dunes, and then for two miles kept along the edge of the waves, but still figures and images flitted through his brain and malicious

imps drummed at his temples. Then suddenly he checked and stood, a motionless white figure, upon the grey sand. Above the noise of the surf he heard the scuttle of crabs making off in all directions. Here before he turned he must sift to the bottom of himself. No, it would not do, this was not the time or place to get mixed up with a woman. He must grapple with events and force them to his will—and yet—in that wide-stretching immensity of the night he cursed at the pitiless insistence of human passion, at the parched metallic taste in his mouth and the drumming of hot blood through his brain. The waves lapped at his feet. He stooped and let the water run over his hands. The feel of it was fresh and cool. He kicked off his shoes and, stripped of shirt and trousers, waded slowly into the black water, which sparkled here and there with little plates of silver. When waist-deep, he plunged and swam out towards the open sea. With now and then his chin under the water he watched, with a sense of passive contemplation, the phosphorescent lining to the ripple that his strokes drove forward. When he had swum out several hundred yards, he turned and looked back at the land which stood out black against the blackness of the night and was edged with a white line of breaking waves. He was now away, free from that confined space, from

the little human houses in which he had slept and lived, free from the pettiness of human thoughts.

He trod water and watched the ripples stirred by his hands. Above his head was the emptiness of space, glittering with the cold fire of infinitely distant worlds; beneath him and around were the still depths of the sea. Yes, and in his brain were the same depths, the same vast expanse, the infinite vision, the loving and deliberate search for knowledge, for the secret. Here he must decide, here where the free waters lapped and enveloped his body, caressing with soft lips, restoring confidence and power. There was no longer any need for decision, the thing was clear. On the one hand there was work, endeavour, the probing of that great mystery, perhaps the vision—life; on the other merely an instinct, that in its good time would be satisfied. He rolled the water aside with a swift stroke of his arm. He had a sudden impulse to shout in this fresh won triumph, but the mysterious hush of the night held him dumb. With quick strokes he made towards the shore, beating the water into glowing eddies. As he walked through the surf, the firm sand beneath his feet, he felt washed clean, clean as earth, air and water, perhaps part of them. A savage would have prayed to his God. He too would pray to his God; his work was his prayer.

Half an hour later, as he walked briskly past the hospital to his house, he noticed that the light was still burning in the surgery. He was on his way to put it out, when the thought struck him that Nurse Desmond might still be there. Instead of going to the door he went to the window and looked through. Yes, she was still there. She was seated near the table over which her body was bent forward. Her forehead was resting on her clasped hands and the light fell on the brown uneven masses of her hair. He stood watching, waiting for her to move, but she did not move. Perhaps she was asleep! and if she were awake of what was she thinking? Was she very lonely? he wondered. For half a minute he watched her, then turned and walked away to his house. As its outline loomed up before him in the darkness he had a strange reluctance to approach and enter the narrow doorway. The spell of the night was still on him, but now mixed and inseparably commingled with the soft caresses of the water and the empty spaces of the sky was the image of a bowed head and white clasped hands.

## CHAPTER IX

FOR a hot week a north wind had been blowing, blowing steadily and incessantly night and day. The sky was cloudless and the wind raced along the beach, driving before it stinging gusts of sand. In places, it swept bare the edges of the dunes, leaving behind an exposed network of grass roots that hung in brown festoons. The fine grains of sand which were beaten against the windows of the hospital found a way in through chinks and crannies and were whirled in eddies through the open doors. For the doctor and the nurses work was made doubly difficult; dust blew continually in their eyes, doors slammed and banged and windows rattled. Then, suddenly, there came a calm, and the sun once more with unchecked heat beat down upon the white sand and the white roofs of the buildings. The stillness came as a relief, though it strangely changed each man or woman in the eyes of the other. Instead of shouting to one another and fighting in and out of doors, with wind-smacked faces, they spoke gently and rather

seldom, letting their words fall, with a kind of half-conscious deliberation, into the silence. To each man or woman the others appeared almost like shadows moving quietly and mysteriously, in some medium different from that of the accustomed round of life and bustle. It was the sudden silence that produced in each this curious and vivid sense of his own isolation, an isolation not terrible but tranquil, contented for the moment to rest and to watch.

A smooth skin spread over the ocean that undulated gently to the swell; and the lagoon to the westward turned to a flat mirror, broken only by the occasional plash of the porpoises. Sometimes a flying fish sped close along the surface, leaving a trail of ripples, and, as it fell back into the sea, set shivering in all directions a series of rings that died away on the even-shining surface. As the days of calm followed one upon another, the people on the island became more conscious than ever before of their isolation. While there was a breeze and things were stirring, they held together, felt united by the activity of the forces without; but now this calm and seemingly deliberate pause in Nature's progress troubled them with vague, unformed questions. It was as if the stillness that hung so ponderously over the sea and lurked in hushed and trembling heat between the

grass blades, had in some unexpected and sudden way slid between their personalities and had imprisoned each in a clear and crystal envelope. There was a feeling of awe, almost of fear, that grew in each human heart, as day after day the calm held and nature, remote yet always terribly near, whispered secrets of her great indifference and her great power into their unwilling ears

Besides feeling his own isolation and the instinctive need for some comradeship, some understanding, Hicksey also felt for the woman, who seemed even more isolated than himself. His imagination had escaped control; she was the centre round which it played. In reveries he often saw before him her sorrowful and thoughtful face, and then he never could forget how she had driven him out into the night. He remembered her quiet dignity of the next day, his own surprise and wonder and his half-admitted disappointment that she should be unmoved and indifferent.

The day after the adventure of his escape from the surgery he had taken James away on a short visit to Kanna Island. He wished to be free from the whole episode, to shake it off. They had spent only a few days there, however, and then had come back in the small half-decked boat that Keynes had sent him. Now that he was once more at the hospital, and calm had fallen upon land and sea,

the stillness of Nature invited thoughts to flow and imagination to play. He was conscious more vividly now than formerly of the comings and goings of the silent, provoking woman, at whose thoughts and feelings he strove to guess.

For a time it seemed to him that he watched her as if from a remote distance. He had almost a scientific interest in her movements, as if he were noticing in some crucial experiment the actions of chemical elements; and yet, when she approached him with any question about the work, this quality of interested spectator would draw back behind a formal and cold exterior.

In that period of calm each day grew to be more stifling than the last, more stifling and more intolerable. In place of the breeze that usually played over the islands, there was a curious thinness in the air in which the human beings, both natives and whites, alike gasped and suffered. In the hospital the routine of work went forward, but each man and woman lived to himself, walking in his own small fraction of the universe and drawing upon all his forces to help resist the oppression and tyranny of the heat.

It was about four o'clock one afternoon that Hicksey and James first heard the breaking of waves. They were sitting in one of the wards amongst the long rows of beds, in which the pa-

tients lay gasping and turning from side to side as if stifled by the close, hot atmosphere, when the silence was distinctly broken by the distinct plashing of the waves upon the shore. The two men looked at each other in surprise, and remarked the strangeness of the occurrence. Then, since the noise increased, they became so interested that they went out to see what was the cause of the sudden disturbance. Above them the sky showed a dull heavy grey, and the sun, a small blazing spot, hung to the westward. On the lagoon a distinct swell was visible that broke in slow, rhythmical waves.

Hicksey listened for a few moments to the dull wash of the waters. "I believe we are going to have a hurricane," he said. "It's just the time of year when they are expected. Wait, I'll go and fetch my barometer and see what it registers." On his way to the house he met the women. They also had come out to see what was the cause of the sudden breaking of the waves. On looking at the barometer he saw that it had dropped two inches. In an instant he took in the significance of this fact, and the feeling of lassitude that had been on him for the last few days was replaced by a sudden throb of excitement. He had heard of the North-East Hurricanes and knew that they did occasionally extend so far south as Fenton Island,

He wondered whether the building would live. He must tell the others and make all possible preparations. He found them gathered together on the beach looking at the ever-increasing swell. They seemed already conscious of the approach of some paroxysm of nature. When he told them of the probability of a severe hurricane, they seemed all of them almost glad at his news. They had all heard stories of the fierce violence of these great winds, but none of them had even come near to such an experience. Now that they were threatened by a common danger they all instinctively held together.

Hicksey sent the women off to the hospital and the houses with instructions to shut and barricade all the windows, then, together with James and with the help of some of the natives, he pulled his boat far up on to the sands, anchored her at bows and stern and buried both anchors. On his way back he went through the camp to warn the natives of the coming storm. He was surprised to find that they already seemed to know that there was some disturbance in the air. They were sitting crouched in little groups under the sand-dunes and looked frightened and miserable. All this while the swell was increasing and the waves now fell with a loud crash upon the beach. Any moment, Hicksey said to himself, the storm might break.

It was not, however, till the sun was sinking in the south-west that they saw a dark mass of clouds spring up with surprising rapidity on the northern horizon. And, then in the shape of a broad arrow flying across the surface of the sea, darkening it and beating it to fury, the storm approached.

Those who were responsible for the building of the hospital had reckoned on the possibility of a hurricane striking the islands. The hospital was well built, with good foundations, and placed in a sheltered position between two huge sand-hills. Hicksey noted with satisfaction that the roof was strongly clamped on to the beams and uprights, and not, as in so many Colonial houses, just held in position by virtue of its own weight. He was careful to see that all the windows were firmly fastened, for he had heard stories of roofs being lifted clean off by the fury of the wind if once it were allowed an entrance.

In the stillness of the central ward they waited. With excitement they watched each other's eager, anxious faces. They could see from between the cracks of the shutters the smooth deep rollers advancing upon the island to break in huge crashing waves upon the beach. Each moment they seemed to get larger. Each crash was distinct like the report of a gun, and then they would hear the long-drawn screech of the retreating water. And as yet

not a breath stirred. Then with a rush the first fury of the wind was upon them; the whole building shook and the iron sides of the house seemed to scream in pain at the air that flew by. Hicksey caught a glimpse of six or seven native women, who had ventured out too late, caught up, blown and tumbled helter-skelter over the crest of a dune, to fall in a clutching, tangled mass on the lee side. Then clouds of sand hid everything from view. Inside the room in the dim light he could see the white, scared faces of the women. In a flash he realized that everything depended upon himself, that they would follow if he gave a lead. To save them from panic, to keep them serviceable and brave, he must keep them occupied. He told them to fetch and light lamps as the darkness, caused by the clouds of sand that were beaten against the window, was almost complete. He himself with James rushed to the door which seemed at any moment on the point of being blown in. They nailed heavy wooden struts across and then treated the other doors in the same way, in case the wind should change and blow from another quarter. Could the building possibly stand? With that immense force beating against one end, must it not at any moment collapse and be carried, a débris of broken beams and twisted iron, far across the island, over the cliffs and into the sea? They

feared to think of that catastrophe, and yet that it did stand gave them courage, and that they could dare to combat with their feeble activities a force so immense and terrifying gave them a tenacious hope, a hope that was impossible in the face of such an adversary, and yet which, elastic, sprang up from under the foot of despair and drove them to fresh efforts

Then came the rain and what was before a rattle and scream became an unbroken deafening roar. They shouted to one another, bending close and screaming in one another's faces. They watched the lips and sometimes caught an articulate and meaning word. In a few minutes the sand was laid and the rain streamed in horizontal rods against the windows and flew by. Outside all was a mad scurry of water and wind, and inside the house there seemed to be a solid core of sound, which every now and then was moulded and given shape to by a louder crash. It was as if waves were intermittently falling upon the roof. They marvelled that it could ever stand. Water was streaming through in fifty places. It was useless to try to check the fierce jets in which it spluttered between every crack in the roof and walls.

Two hours passed, and yet the building held together. The floors were running with water, and sand and dead leaves had found their way in and

were plastered against walls and ceilings. Everything was wet through; the native patients lay each huddled in her bed under a mass of saturated blankets. The members of the white staff were each wet to the skin, and would have been in utter darkness had it not been for the lanterns, for it was impossible to keep lamps alight. And yet each had now a vague and obstinate hope. They believed that they might live through, hoped that they had lived through the worst. Now they no longer felt fear or thought of terrible eventualities. They had now become accustomed to the incessant roar and bluster of the storm, and even the crashing of the thunder and the white sudden glare of the lightning had ceased to make them wince. They were tired, very tired, and their senses were dull, wearied out by the monotony of sound. They hoped for life and yet had ceased to fear death. It was as if a heavy and profound sleepfulness had been precipitated from out the fierce vortex of contesting sounds. They regarded each other, wet and dishevelled. Nurse Toms had sunk into a corner and had already fallen asleep, though all about her rushed little eddies and waves of water. Hicksey signed that they should not wake her. He shouted to the others that they had better go and rest, if they could. There was nothing more to be done.

Ever since the storm had broken he had moved from room to room, doing all he could to protect things of value. His scientific instruments and microscopes he had placed on a table in his surgery, and covered with a large waterproof sheet. It was his business, so long as the place held together, to save what was possible. There was no question yet of taking any rest, but the others, who were cold and wearied out, might just as well sleep if they found it possible. He left them and went into the surgery.

On the table the lantern was still burning as he had left it half an hour ago. Now that he was alone he felt a relief as if pressure had been removed. His task, he felt, was practically achieved; he had kept them all up to the mark. There had been no panic, no show of uncontrolled fear. Now he could safely leave them and was glad to be alone. Something within himself, that he had till now controlled with a practical severity, some imaginative and romantic quality of his youth, was now free to roam. He was able to imagine and even see himself standing there by the table in the feeble light of the lantern. He saw his slight, wiry figure, with the wet clothes clinging close about him. He pictured his face and his own features; he knew that his eyes were burning with a newly kindled excitement. He

was conscious of an even poise between physical exhaustion and mental activity and knew that his senses and his powers of thought, which were at best but tools of his larger self, pieces of some machine, had ceased to claim for themselves the destiny and purpose of his life, and had fallen into their secondary and true places. His body, instinctive and all knowing, had now supreme command. Outside, the hurricane screamed and throbbed. In him was the centre, the core, the nucleus of the universe. Then, as if to challenge the courage of his mood, the thunder burst and crackled above his head and the lightning streamed in white rivers down the sky. Noise deafening and sudden, the world, the universe, all that was not himself was there, and the night, black and impenetrable, white, blinding, vanishing before his gaze. In himself, there was repose, silence—silence profound, unutterably deep. He had never before guessed at its vigorous and intoxicating power. He stood poised on the brink of action, wild and reckless. The silence within grew larger and larger. It was impossible to contain so much life and live. Any instant now he might be whirled out into the forces that raged past.

He snatched himself out of his trance with an impulsive movement and half turned. Not two

feet from him was Nurse Desmond, her eyes, both timid and daring, fixed on his face. How long she had stood beside him he knew not, for in the roar of the tempest he had heard nothing of her approach. His heart, already beating fiercely in excitement, leapt in his breast. Beyond that he made no movement, but stood for some seconds facing her. In her eyes there was a daring as high as any he could rise to. It was a challenge, a call. All the man in him must answer the honour of such an assault; and yet his pity at the same instant saw, peeping from behind the mask of her courage, knowledge of terrors, occult and impenetrable, warders of the soul on its lonely pilgrimage. Pity and admiration mingled to a passionate and impulsive adoration. Here concentrated into a human form was all the mystery of the elements, the elements that raged past them, breaking all obstructions, gone mad in their freedom. Behind her eyes he saw life surging and beckoning; at one glance in full flood, and at the next more painfully, extravagantly alluring in its ebb, that left her body like a beautiful casket crying to be filled with his supreme vitality.

With an action direct in its simplicity she raised her hands to her face, then impulsively laid them upon his shoulders and drew him forward. Thought of his work and of his resolution no

longer existed; here was a grip greater than that of any individual will. His arms were round her and he covered her face and neck with passionate kisses. She clung to him, half sobbing in her triumph. In the flickering and dim light of the lantern her upturned face looked like the white flower of some clinging plant, a plant that loves and clings, some parasite that flourishes with supreme arrogance upon the forces that it drains. Held in each other's arms the silence was for them profound and mysterious. Together they formed the nucleus, the centre round which the universe spun in a wild flurry of elements. Out in the night the hurricane raged in unabated fury.

## CHAPTER X

ON the morning after the storm, as Hicksey walked through the débris of the wrecked wards he felt a newly-born lightness and exultation. The sharp strain of the preceding days had suddenly snapt and given place to unexpected relief. He now realized how severe that strain had been and felt that by the removal of a weight, which in retrospect seemed intolerable and absurd, he had been set free for new and better work. He was willing and glad to admit that Alice Desmond had won over him a great and lasting victory. He rejoiced that the struggle was over and reproached himself with folly for having held out so long. As for what the others might think, that could hardly concern him; he was strong enough to maintain his own position and ignore their petty criticisms. These criticisms, however, did not come as quickly as he had expected, and for the next few days all hands were claimed by the common cause for repairing the damage done by the storm.

The weeks that followed were the happiest that

Hicksey had yet spent on the island. Nurse Desmond appeared to take a real and intelligent interest in his work, and he was glad to talk over his hopes and the general scheme of his work, and was pleased to find some one so sympathetic to his ideas. For these weeks he worked hard and better than he had ever worked before. He often during this time found occasion to reproach himself for having been so foolish as ever to have imagined that there was not room enough in life both for ambition and love. Here among the primitive conditions of an unvalued and wild island he would prove that there was ample scope for both.

After the damage done by the hurricane had been repaired, the people at the hospital settled down to regular work. All day the doctor worked either in his private room or in the wards, and in the evening at sunset he would walk with Nurse Desmond along the yellow sandy beaches or over the rough cliffs of the island.

The problem that solved itself so easily for the man was not, however, so easy for the woman. The fact that she loved and had won him was in itself the chief significance of her life. She took, it is true, a keen interest in his work, but this was because all his activities had for so many years been closely interwoven with it. His work was

perhaps his chief attribute, but she did not love the work, she loved the man. Before long she saw it as a successful rival to herself and her own powers, and with growing resentment she was angry that it should take up so much of his time. She still questioned and talked to him about the research upon which he was engaged, but with growing envy and jealousy, and she watched closely, trying to determine how much of his life she could consider hers and how much escaped her and found expression in his work. She wanted every bit of him, and hated to think that he could escape into a land where she could not follow and was not needed.

It was now that Alice Desmond began to feel the narrow limits of the island. There was no life possible for her save that which she found in the doctor's company. The habits and surroundings of ordinary civilized life could here give no diversion. There was nothing but the two or three iron houses of the settlement, the hospital full of black patients, the arid, far-stretching sand-dunes and the blazing sun overhead. The other nurses were distant and discreet in all that they said, and watched her with envy and a malignant vigilance. With them she could hope for no sort of friendship. The rigid and hard rules that they had laid down for themselves they would not allow an-

other woman to break without exacting the utmost penalty.

As the weeks passed a tedious monotony settled once more upon the hospital. The daily occupations became stale and wearisome. Even Hicksey was touched by a feeling of lassitude. He found it more difficult to work and felt that his interest was failing. The early enthusiasm for his work faded, and Nurse Desmond came to occupy more and more of his thoughts. Half consciously he knew that she claimed him, tried to possess him altogether. For a time he drifted, letting his work fall into the background. He gave less time to his research and lost altogether his former keenness and youthful delight in overcoming obstacles. He worked now with the dogged insistence born of the necessity of accomplishing a set task.

One day alone in his laboratory he realized with unflinching certainty how greatly his standard had fallen, and how far superior the work that he was doing two months or a year ago was to that which he was now producing. He experienced bitter self-contempt and humiliation. He hated himself and felt a newly born resentment towards Alice Desmond. He paced up and down his room, thinking hard, anxious as always to think clearly and know where he was. No, he could not give her up; but rather than do bad work he would

for the time give up research. He would take life on the note that seemed most definite, take the woman and all that she could give, let his passion run without check or curb. He would exhaust her charm, her sex, her mystery, and then, the wiser and the stronger, live once again his own life. And yet, as the days passed and the unbroken monotony of the island pressed upon him, he found that he was becoming always more and more unhappy and less at ease with his own conscience. Yet he was no weakling to be harassed by regrets; he had no shame for his passion, no evil conscience towards nature, no shame even over the thoughts of past experiences. It was what he had left undone that troubled him, his work and the possibilities that he was letting slide. Could he ever recover himself, ever again give body and mind to that unrewarded, passionate search for knowledge, the unveiling of what was veiled? Every day the thought smouldered; but there stood between him and his work the presence of a woman's body, her white face and soft hands, the remembrance of all his desire and of all her love. And then, besides the difficulties of his own struggle, there was the presence to be reckoned with of the other people on the island. They somehow created a feeling of dense obscurity. To them also, at the time of the storm, had come a glimpse

of an intenser life; but, so soon as all danger was past, each felt around for the accustomed grooves, and being children of habit they instinctively sought for those conditions which in previous times of security had made for their survival. For a short period fear had pulled them together, and they had met with serious and unmasked faces the prospect of death, but now they were ashamed of that nakedness, and were anxious lightly to assume a disguise which would serve the double purpose of hiding their personalities and of converting to the trivial the poignant possibilities of existence. It was not long before the conventional and orthodox view of the situation assumed large proportions, the more so perhaps as they had little outside their own work to think about. They forgot that in the time of danger they had respected the doctor as by natural right their leader, and soon afterwards they began to condemn his actions.

Hicksey and Nurse Desmond made little or no effort to conceal their passion. The doctor was not troubled by what might be said of him. If his actions could pass his own criticism, he had little fear of what others might say. For Alice Desmond things were not so easy; not that she was much troubled by her conscience, but she was wrought almost to desperation by her resentment

of criticism either spoken or implied. While Hicksey was with her their life in common excluded nearly all else. The other women stood in awe of him and were careful what they said. They were careful always what they said, and just by this and by silences and glances they let her know how much they held themselves superior. When she was alone she learnt to fear them as she feared the world that they reflected. She tried hard to hold herself above her fear and above her resentment, but she sank always beneath them. And then a secret and a greater fear lurked in her, that they might see that she held him only on an uncertain thread, that she lacked confidence in her power, and that her life was staked upon the struggle to captivate and to hold. Even while she delighted in his surrender and in the caresses he gave, her thought and her one desire was, how could she hold him for always, make him her slave and her master. She must have him undivided, be to him all-sufficient.

Lacking the imagination to worship where he had worshipped, she wished all worship to cease save at the shrine of her own sex. And always she doubted him, divined a restless conscience, an enemy that she could never come at, that she feared must always escape. Now for some months their relation had been developing. It had changed

and taken on unexpected aspects. From the first onrush of passion it had grown to that familiar sense of possession and dependence one upon the other. And yet it was impossible for them to be at rest. The power of sex could not be all-sufficient. If there was in their relation little beyond the attraction of man for woman, there was at least this between them that they stood together to bear the criticism of the others. It was during this time that Hicksey felt most strongly the weight of all the previous quarrel with Dr. Hubbard. The ill-feelings that he had then disturbed were now reawakened in the two nurses, and he knew that they now hated him quite passionately, and that he and Alice Desmond stood isolated, surrounded by feelings of disapproval. This disapproval had sprung largely from sexual jealousy, and it had grown to be an overwhelming passion that enveloped even his smallest actions and clung poisonously about the woman who had staked everything upon winning him.

For a long time he had tried to dominate the situation, to carry everything forward as if nothing exceptional were in the air. He had partly succeeded, but there had come feelings of exasperation and self-contempt. It was humiliating to know himself the centre round which so many mean and petty motives played. At such times

he ceased to be able to get a fair view of himself, and only knew that his work was heavy and laborious but somehow a relief, and that when his work was done he met Alice Desmond with pleasure, feeling that her presence deadened and made tolerable the ever-growing feeling of self-contempt.

Every day he worked in the hospital, and executed what had to be done with a dogged care and thoroughness, and every evening he would find Nurse Desmond waiting for him on the sand-hills by the path that led to his house. He had arranged that they should see little of each other during the daytime, and that they should work in different wards. He did not even know what time she finished her work, but every evening he found her waiting, and he looked forward eagerly to those meetings when he could forget everything in the pleasure of her presence.

The day's work over, he walked over the sand-dunes towards the house. In the distance he could see her white and blue dress, a bright mark against the yellow sands and grey bushes. Her general poise, the lines of her figure and even the movements of her garments were now familiar and reminiscent. He knew them all by heart. As she drew near he felt a warmth of pleasure and a welcome relaxation from his mood of discontent.

Whatever he might have lost on this remote outpost of civilization, he had gained possession and won dominion over this alluring woman who charmed him, as a dangerous and beautiful toy might charm some happy child. In her presence he could still forget himself and hide his uneasy conscience.

He greeted her with an outstretched hand. "I am late to-day."

"Not so late, but I've known you later. I would rather wait out here than in the house where the others are always watching everything I do. They never seem to be satisfied. Even now they are watching to see if you meet me."

"Let them watch and be damned. Shall we strike across the island and keep along the high cliffs on the east side? We don't often go that way." Then, after a pause: "You mustn't mind what they say or think; my position is too strong for anything I do to matter. The authorities don't find it so easy to get good men to work in an out-of-the-way place like this."

They walked single file along a narrow path that led between the bushes to higher ground. He led and she followed; every now and then he turned to look at her. The wind was in her hair and in her garments. She smiled at him happily and proudly. In a little more than a mile they

reached the cliffs to the eastward. Here there was open grass-land, and they sat for a while looking at the rugged coast-line and the waves that beat against it far below. In such a place, far away by themselves, they could find opportunity to forget the others and the petty life of the island; here, with the soft wind blowing by, the grass and small flowers under their feet and the ocean, blue and iridescent, spread wide and far to meet the sky on the distant arc of the horizon, here they could forget everything but one another and live in the contentment of the moment. At such times he felt real pride in her possession, and admitted that she counted as part of his life in a way no other woman had ever counted. Yes, she had made a great difference and had now a real hold on him, and oh yes, she was worth it all. And yet there was stirring somewhere deep, an uneasy conscience that told him that he had sacrificed too much—what he had done against himself could not be forgiven. When she was close to him, this conscience shrank to its smallest and everything would be forgotten and lost in the great spaces of her tempting and evasive charm. There was something in her love surprisingly personal that touched the very quick of his life, and then there were times when he drew back from her contact, frightened at some glimpse of her

aloofness, an aloofness and indifference as of nature herself. Not that he ever thought that she did not love him; he knew that she loved him all too passionately; but he saw at times gaping and alluring, yet black and repulsive, abysses into which he might be drawn. And while he staggered on the brink, some half-disclosed genius of her sex stood aside, mechanical and automatous, indifferent to his fate.

For some time they stayed talking together on the cliff, then he suggested that he would clamber down and have a bathe.

"Promise not to go beyond the coral pools," she said; "it's very dangerous out in the breakers."

"All right, I promise; but it's really quite safe."

He left her and for a time disappeared behind an outstanding piece of rock, then again she saw him far below, a brown figure against the deep blue of the pools.

When he had bathed and was once more dressed, he began to climb the cliff. Near the top he came on a grassy plateau. He called to her to come and join him there.

"No, come up here," she answered; "I can't get down, it's too steep."

"Oh yes, you can. I'm sure you can if you try. I want to talk to you."

She clambered towards him. He went halfway up to give her a hand. "I've never clambered about like this before," she complained. "Well, what is it?"

"What I have to tell you is that I'm going away the day after to-morrow. I've simply got to go."

She was all anxiety in a moment. "What? Where are you going to?"

"I am only going to Kanna Island; I haven't been there for ten days."

"Must you go there again so soon? You seem to be always rushing to and fro. I thought at first when you said you were going that you meant you were going to the mainland. Tell me, you don't want to leave me, do you?"

"No, of course I don't, but I have to go over there if it's only to keep that man Sherwin in his place. He's been getting very sulky lately, very conceited and uppish; I wouldn't be surprised to find that he had taken to drink. The absolutely solitary life he leads is not good for any one, but the funny thing is he seems to like it. It's curious how loneliness grows on a man. I don't believe if he had the chance he'd go back to civilization."

"And do you want to go back?" she asked.

"I don't want to go now, but some day I shall I suppose." A long minute passed and neither of

them spoke, but they sat side by side in silence looking out over the deep blue of the restless sea. "I wonder if I *could* go back," he mused. "Could you?"

She put her arms round him. "No, dear, I don't want to go and I *don't* want you to go." For a while they sat clasped in the fading light. Then suddenly he shook himself free.

"There's no need to be so serious," he laughed. "There's no question of my going yet. It's best to take short views of life. But if I'm to keep my job I must work thoroughly and give these others no chance of finding fault and saying that I'm no better than Hubbard."

"Yes, I suppose you must go," she admitted, "but you don't realize how I suffer while you are away. The others make things too intolerable. I don't know where to be or where to look, but keep shut up in my room and pray that no harm may come to you. Will you promise, promise me that you will not take such awful risks as you did last time you were away. Remember that I would rather be without you for a few days than that you should take such risks."

"You forget," he laughed, "that I wanted to get back to *you:* I might have had to wait for another week for the wind to change."

"But it was frightfully dangerous." Then she

laughed at the reminiscence. "I shall never forget how poor James looked when he came in all dripping; did you really throw him overboard?"

"Not exactly that," he said. "You see it was like this. When I got into the harbour I saw that it was too rough to bring the boat up to the rocks as I usually do. She simply would have been battered to pieces, so the only thing to do was to leave her at the moorings, and the only way to get ashore then was to swim. Well, I asked James if he could swim. He said no. He's a silly fellow after all the chances he has had. Then I told him I was going to swim ashore, as I didn't fancy staying the night on board wet through as I was. He begged me not to leave him; and finally consented to let me tow him to land. It was nothing much of a business, only a quarter of a mile or so."

She laughed again at the recollection. "Poor man, he looked very frightened and, when he told me that you had swum back to fetch your instruments, he didn't get much sympathy from me. That was wicked of you. You never thought about me then, or what would become of me if you were drowned." She spoke reprovingly. "I don't believe you'd have swum back to fetch me!"

"I'd have towed you ashore just as I towed James."

A cool wind blew past them. She leaned towards him, seemed to hesitate, then, speaking quickly: "Couldn't I come with you?"

He answered impulsively: "No, I don't think so"; and then, after a short silence, "And yet I don't see why you shouldn't—that is, if you'd really like to come. My position is strong enough to do what I like. So long as I do my work as thoroughly as I do, they will never sack me." Then as if half-delighted with the idea: "There's no doubt the others will be furious. It will give them something to make a song about," and he laughed. He was pleased at the excitement that the idea stirred in him. "Yes, come if you like, I'd like you to come. There's plenty of work to be done."

Now that he had raised no objections, she was a little frightened at the boldness of her request; a little disappointed too at his rising to the adventure rather than to the idea of her being with him. He went on, full of his own thoughts. "If you come I shall be away ten days at least. There is plenty of work in which you can help. And here things are going so smoothly that I can leave them to James. He's a capable enough fellow, and a nice fellow too, if he wasn't got at so easily by those two women. My word, won't they be angry!"

Alice Desmond was frightened at the so easy granting of her request. She hated to stay, and yet she was afraid to go. She felt that then she would be so doubly committed and so much at his mercy. She wished that he could see the sacrifice that she was making and longed too for some assurance that his love would last. She stood up and looked at him for some moments in silence. Then she bent over him and looked seriously into his eyes.

"Can you promise me that you love me? That you really *do* love me; that you will never leave me? Remember, I am willing to make every sacrifice for you."

He met her eyes for a moment, then let them fall and rest on the far horizon. His answer was almost a complaint. "I have made every sacrifice for *you*." The thought flashed through his brain: "How can I know that I shall not hate her in a month's time?" But he added, "Of course I love you. Only come with me and I will show you how much."

## CHAPTER XI

WHEN, three months earlier, the two doctors sailed away towards Fenton Island, Sherwin had been glad of their departure. As he stood upon the crest of the high sand-hill and watched the sail of the "Shark" disappear into the distance, he was glad to feel once more undisputed power over the island. The doctors had neither of them, of late, given him much society, and now that they were gone he found nothing to regret. They had stirred his anger and contempt at their professional jealousies and personal indifference to his sufferings, and, although he was grateful enough to Hicksey for saving his hand, he felt sore and injured that his overtures of friendship had been so coldly received.

He stood on the hill-top till he saw the last flicker of white disappear into the distant blue. Then as he walked slowly towards his own house, he felt rise within him, once more, his own importance as undisputed ruler of the island. When he reached his house he pulled his cane chair out on to the verandah, took out his pipe, loaded and

lit it, then sat in silence enjoying the sense of isolation. He listened to the distant plashing of the waves and the monotonous murmur of insects' wings with a quiet enjoyment.

Now that his hand was almost healed he could look back with a sense of happy escape upon the time of his suffering, upon all those days of loneliness when hope and despair struggled together and he had seen the terrors of existence peeping from behind their veils. Yet he still remembered with pride that even in those days of distress and humiliation he had kept his power over the others. Now that he was once more master of himself, he could put that power to some purpose and teach his gang of workers to fear him as Coffee feared him. Already he had shown them that he was to be feared, and they had not forgotten how one hot day when he was in a bullying and hectoring mood, and one of them had made for him, with one hand only he had laid the fellow out, and then had not omitted, as he himself expressed it, "to put his feet into him." Oh, yes, he knew how to treat niggers! He moved nervously at the recollection, and was no longer conscious of the quiet sounds of the islands.

Yes, he was glad the two doctors had gone; then he thought with a pang of envy that they had gone back to their women. At that moment he ques-

tioned with petulant annoyance why he should be left alone on a desert island with a lot of pagan black men. He got up and paced to and fro on the verandah. His earlier mood of quiet satisfaction was replaced by a sense of the discords that he contained. He could not tear himself away from the life on the island; he had come to understand it too well; it had already claimed too much of him, and yet he chafed at the unnatural condition of his life. Damn those doctors, they were clever enough to keep their women shut up on the other island.

He shouted to Coffee who was rattling pans in an out-house that served as a kitchen.

The black came and stood before him.

"Sit down, Coffee, I want to talk to you." Sherwin flung himself into his own chair. Coffee squatted down upon his heels and for some moments the white man regarded him in silence.

"How long have you been on this island, Coffee?"

"Long time, Master, not quite sure how long."

"What for you come here?"

"I come along o' boat, by and by I go back along o' boat."

Sherwin grunted, then he asked: "Are you married man, Coffee? Have you got woman in your country?"

"Yes, master. I got um woman and two pickininny."

"What time you go back and see your woman?"

Coffee shrugged his shoulders and made no reply.

"What for you leave your woman and pickininny?"

Again he shrugged and made no answer. Sherwin shouted at him. "Don't sit there grinning. Answer me, do you hear?"

"I not know, master, I come along o' boat."

"Yes, I know you came in a boat; that's not answering my question."

Coffee, not understanding this last remark, grinned nervously.

"Doesn't know when he came, doesn't know when he's going. Poor devil doesn't know where he is even." Then Sherwin laughed brutally. "Do you think all boats go to your bloody little islands?"

Again not understanding, the black continued to grin.

Sherwin bent forward and spoke deliberately at him. "I think um, Coffee, other fellow get your woman by this time."

"No, master."

For some moments both men were silent. Sherwin, feeling that it was impossible to make the

savage feel the true and terrible isolation of his position, changed the subject. "What place you get um Yangona root?"

"Big ship bring um plenty Yangona root, white fellow Kaimera give me plenty."

Sherwin was surprised at this information and determined to ask Pomfrey to bring over a fresh supply; then his mind reverted to the former subject. It struck him as comic that the fellow should be so trusting and so ignorant. He talked out loud for his own satisfaction, not expecting Coffee to understand. "It's a funny thing that you should have got dumped on this island. You'll never get off, you poor devil! You'll never see your woman and your pickininnies; don't you think it. You'll be stuck in a hole, and the sand chucked over you." Then, after a pause, "Fetch some Yangona and we'll have a drink."

Coffee was glad to escape from the fire of questions and the talk that he could not understand, and was glad to busy himself with something concrete. When he came with the root, Sherwin took some from him and chewed in silence. It was the first time he had tasted any since the arrival of the two doctors.

As they sat thus, both occupied at the same uncouth task, Sherwin was often amused by his own picture of the strangeness of the scene. He was

surprised too that he and the other man, products of such different lands and civilizations, should be so unfeignedly glad to renew their old manner of life.

This was the first evening of many others that followed when they thus sat together, and let their thoughts wander out over the wild land. For the most part they sat in silence and each lived to himself his own life, but Sherwin sometimes found himself wondering if Coffee ever thought of his wife and children. He himself would have been glad of wife and children. Yes, with a wife, he told himself, he would be happy indeed, and would never want to go back to the world of civilization, unless, perhaps, his brother found gold, and that would no doubt alter his view. With gold he would have power, more power than he wielded here; power to buy women, any woman he might wish for. But from his brother he had heard no good news lately, and he was beginning to give up hope.

The evenings with Coffee on the verandah were his relaxation after his hard days of work. In the daytime Sherwin was a hard task-master; not only did he keep the natives at their road-making and building, but had made them race over the island and catch all the goats. These he pegged out on tethers near the camp. He had also taught

the natives to make fences and stretch wire and had enclosed the sheep in paddocks. All these activities were not so much for the benefit of his employers or to win praise from Hicksey as for his own gratification, as signs of his own power.

He came to take small stock of what Hicksey said, whether it was praise or blame, and took little notice of him when he came at certain intervals on his visits to the islands.

Since there was no other white man to talk to, Sherwin had made a one-sided friendship with Pomfrey and looked forward to his visits. The old seaman brought him things from Kaimera, including bottles of whisky; and the two men very often went up to the house and drank together and shared the gossip of the two islands. It was Pomfrey who told him the story of the fight and of Hubbard's discomfiture. At first he had been pleased to hear of Hicksey's success, and very pleased when Hicksey offered him the post of assistant at the hospital. He took a thorough interest in learning his work, but he was annoyed that all his overtures of friendship should be so coldly received by the young doctor.

Hicksey, on his occasional visits to the islands, was always civil, but he never let Sherwin forget that they came from different levels in the social strata, and this the latter considered to be uppish

and conceited. If the young fellow was going to take that line, he would show him he could very well do without his company, and so he would spend the evenings on his own verandah, thinking his own thoughts, and learning to endure his solitude, and sometimes talking to the silent-moving, enigmatic black fellow.

All through the days of calm that preceded the hurricane, Sherwin, as if in some desperate answer to his own flagging strength, had worked the natives pitilessly hard. After his work he would lie gasping on his bed. The heat stifled him, and, in spite of all his virile strength, sapped him of his power. He lay sometimes for hours upon his bed, morose and sulky, his red face and chest beaded over with sweat, cursing at the country and its hardships, and thinking enviously of the land he had left. And yet in spite of his maledictions upon the land, he knew in himself that it would need some strong outside stimulus to shake him from the new-found way of life.

During these days of extreme heat Coffee kept his distance, for all the latent cruelty in the white man was aroused, and moved on the surface of his nature, as if eager to meet the cruelty of the tropical heat and mingle with its fierce blaze of colour. One of its manifestations was in the branding and castrating of the goats. Coffee, half-frightened,

half savagely exultant, helped; but, when they had done and the frightened animals made off bleating and trembling with pain, the black was apprehensive for his own skin and feared to meet his master's blood-shot eye.

With the first breaking of the waves upon the shore, Coffee was seized with terror. He knew what they foreboded, and, half in English, half in his own language, he managed to convey to Sherwin something of their significance. To Sherwin as to Hicksey the possibilities of danger came at first as a stimulant. His care was to make the houses secure, and while thus occupied he felt little fear, only excitement; but later, when the waves gathered in size and came crashing upon the shore, and there was nothing left to do but to watch and wonder and guess at what they might forebode, then he began, little by little, to be infected by the black fellow's fear.

Fear, once allowed an entrance, swells like a river in flood; bursts all bonds and flows into every cranny of the spirit. Sherwin, afraid even of himself and of his own thoughts, trembled now before that ominous silence in which nature took breath before the fury that was to come. He knew that he dare not be alone, he must at all hazards keep close to his black servant.

Nothing would induce Coffee to enter either of

the houses, but he moved to and fro restlessly looking for hollows in the sand-hills, and all the while mumbling in his own language forebodings of the storm. Both white man and black felt that they needed all the support that they could get; they urgently felt that they must be near to other human beings, and so went down to the roughly made hospital, where the natives were all gathered together in frightened expectation.

For the first time in his existence Sherwin knew that he was but one of a number, and that he was losing all feeling of individual aloofness. All his hectoring superiority dwindled and disappeared. He was only one amongst a crowd of frightened savages, waiting in trepidation and impotence to see nature put forth her strength and assert her terrible mastery.

The hurricane came with a burst of fury, driving the waves far up the beach. With the first onrush of wind the flimsy construction of the hospital was whirled away across the island, and beds and sick natives were tumbled in a mass among the stinging clouds of sand. For a while Sherwin knew nothing beyond the fact that the place had gone and that he was lying at full length, blinded and struggling for breath. All his energies were centred upon breathing, getting air into his lungs without swallowing too much

sand. At length he wriggled himself into a hollow and lay there, clutching with his fingers at the grass roots, while the rain drove down upon him and the hurricane flew by above his head.

After he had recovered from the first outraged surprise and panic he rose to a crouching position and peered round. In the dim light he could see little save the wild scurry of elements, and now and then the dark form of some native who stumbled and clutched his way across the sand-hills, to disappear into some hollow. A fiercer gust of wind half rolled him over. He lay close to the earth and muttered prayers to his long-forgotten God, who seemed to be shouting in all His wrath from the heart of the tempest. How many hours he lay on the sand-hills he did not know, but he knew that night had come quick on the heels of the tempest to add darkness to his other terrors. Although the wind was blowing with terrific fury, it would have been possible, had he had the will and the courage, for him to have fought his way to his house. But instead of making any such effort, he lay still like some animal wincing under a hail of blows. Every now and then the lightning gave a vivid picture of the island and the fury of the sea. In the distance he could see his house still standing, and round about him on the sand were the prone figures of the natives. Then blackness

would follow the flash, and he was conscious of nothing but the wind and the water screaming past.

For a time he must have slept, for he was oblivious of all sensation, then suddenly and unexpectedly he became conscious of something moving over his leg. He turned and groped in the darkness, but could find nothing. Then a flash of lightning revealed Coffee's black figure crouching at his feet. He was unspeakably glad of the black's presence. In the ensuing darkness he stretched till he felt the round head, which he drew towards him. He felt an unaccountable and desperate need for human comradeship. He longed to speak but could find no words. Somehow he must give expression to his newly kindled consciousness. "By God, by God!" he shouted at the head that he still held in his hands. Coffee crept nearer and shouted something that was lost in a crash of thunder. "All right, Master, all right!" The two men lay side by side, glad of each other's company and glad to have heard each other's voices. During the hours that followed there grew slowly, inevitably, as does a seed that forces its way through the soil, an understanding and a sympathy between the two men.

Naked in fear and self-effacement they had seen nature in all her ruthless anger, and now, as the

storm abated, felt that in those hours of subjective terror they had met at last on common ground.

In the morning the hurricane abated, though the sea ran high, sending great waves roaring up the beach, and a strong wind was still blowing. Sherwin, cramped and bruised from the long night of exposure, walked stiffly between the sand-hills rousing the natives, telling them to bestir themselves and make a fire if they did not want to feel the shape of his boots. Now that his own fear had passed, he must at all hazards re-establish his authority, and among the wet and miserable natives this was no very difficult task. At first he was a little diffident of his own power, and this made him unnecessarily brutal, but gradually, as he recognized that his prestige was little shaken, he gathered courage and felt that he could afford to speak to them in his usual half-hectoring, half-joking manner.

The next few days were spent in the construction of a new hospital resembling that which had been blown away, and in repairs to the two houses, both of which had successfully stood the storm. By the time Hicksey turned up a week later things were working once more with their accustomed regularity and Sherwin was well assured of all his former authority.

The two men had little to say to one another

beyond short comments upon the fierceness of the storm and conversation directly concerning the native patients and the newly wrecked hospital. Hicksey praised the ability and promptness with which Sherwin had acted, and then gave his instructions as to the order of things at the hospital. While Sherwin listened in silence the doctor thought that he detected a scornful curl on the man's lip and a look of mutiny in his eye, and later, when he had returned to his own house, he had a distinct, and, as he felt, a growing antipathy towards the red-haired burly fellow.

Sherwin on his part returned moody and sulky to his house. He was annoyed and humiliated by Hicksey's visit. Somehow the presence of the other white man had made him feel ashamed of his behaviour on the night of the hurricane. Damn the man with his superior airs and his "do this, do that." Sherwin's heart painfully contracted at the thought that any of the blacks might say how during the night of the hurricane he had lain terror-stricken on the dunes. He needed to assure himself that he was every bit as good a man as the doctor. It was no doubt easy enough for Hicksey to carry things off with his gentlemanly airs; he had not been left alone amongst a crowd of savages, but had another white man and three white women to keep him company.

And yet, in spite of his excuse to himself, Sherwin knew that somehow he had lost caste, lost his distinction as a white man. With the niggers his position was still safe enough. By virtue of his physical force and nervous energy he could always bully them into submission, but he feared that Hicksey might see him for what he was, think him to be a coward, and in his damned superior way treat him as such. He would show him that in no way would he truckle to his arrogant assurance.

For the rest of Hicksey's visit he saw little of him, and when the day of his departure came, although Sherwin knew that he was leaving for Fenton Island that afternoon, he decided that he would not go down to the shore as was customary to see him off and receive last instructions, but in his place he sent Coffee to help the doctor down with the boat. As soon as he had sent Coffee, he was half afraid of his own daring, for he knew Hicksey was not a man to be trifled with. For a while he watched Coffee's figure, becoming smaller in the distance, then he went into his room, picked up one of the magazines that lay littered on the floor, and turned over the pages. After what seemed a long time he heard Coffee's steps on the verandah and a knock at the door.

"Well, what is it?" he shouted, testily.

Coffee opened the door and stood looking embarrassed. "Doctor he say, 'Tell Mr. Sherwin come along down to the beach.' "

"Did he tell you to tell me that? What was it he said?"

"He said, 'Tell Mr. Sherwin come down and talk to me.' "

Sherwin lowered at him; Coffee stood awkwardly shifting from one foot to the other. "All right, then, get out of here. What are you waiting for?" Coffee muttered something and then vanished. Sherwin swore to himself as he walked slowly across the room to pick up his hat. Then deliberately taking his time he walked through the door, down the steps of the verandah, and across the white glare of the sand-dunes. He found Hicksey sitting on the edge of his boat, which had not been pulled down.

The doctor waited till he had come down, then said: "I want you to give me a hand with my boat, Sherwin."

Sherwin said nothing, but took hold of one of the bulwarks, and together they dragged her down to the break of the waves, where they paused for a moment.

"Thank you," said Hicksey, "and another time don't send your servant to do your own work." Before giving Sherwin time to say anything, he

went on: "I wanted to tell you that I think you are working the convalescent natives too hard. There's no reason to break their backs; I want you to slack off a little. If you work in the mornings, that's quite enough. Give them the afternoons to themselves."

Sherwin turned very red. "It is I who have to keep discipline here, doctor. You had better let me keep it my own way and manage my own men."

Hicksey looked his man straight in the face, and there was rising anger in his voice as he said: "They don't happen to be your men. They are here under my charge, and you are to carry out my orders." Then breaking off: "Give another shove at the boat, will you?"

Both men ran out through the waves, shoving the boat before them, then Hicksey jumped on board.

Sherwin walked slowly back over the sand-hills. He cursed alternately at Hicksey and then at himself for being so easily mastered. Coffee he found sitting on the steps waiting for him. He walked past in silence and then turned and told the black to begone into the kitchen.

That evening he got very drunk on whisky, and felt brave enough to pitch Hicksey into the sea and his boat after him. The next morning he stayed late in bed to sleep off the effects. When he

finally got down to the hospital, he found the natives waiting for him in front of the ward. It was not usual for him to be late. He felt a throbbing in his temples and was disinclined for work. He told the blacks they could take a holiday and then himself sat down and dozed in the shade. After his mid-day meal he called to Coffee to bring out some Yangona root, and all through the afternoon sat chewing and drinking. Its effect after the whisky was soothing.

For the next few days he kept the natives mildly employed, but now that he had not complete control, he ceased to feel that pride in his work and pleasure in his power which hitherto had kept him to his task. If the doctor knew so much better than he did how to manage the island, let him have some of the responsibility of keeping the beggars in order.

Since he was now not much occupied, he took to sitting in his room, sometimes talking to himself, sometimes looking through old papers, and keeping himself cool with occasional nips of whisky and water. He began to hate the life he led, from which he knew he could not break away, and only in the evenings when he drank Kava with Coffee did he ever feel the quiet sense of enjoyment of the earlier months. The Kava seemed certainly to calm his nerves and steady him after

the whisky. Sometimes in moments of clear-sightedness, that came to him after many bowls of the white pulpy liquid, he would think regretfully of his brother on the gold-fields and curse his own lot that had brought him to such an outlandish spot, to a life so distant from that of civilized man.

## CHAPTER XII

IN the civilized countries of Europe the wheels of social organization turn in their predestined grooves. Man lives as he can adapt himself to their inexorable movement, and, in the end, his individual existence is crushed by the ever-urging destiny of the race that carries his children onward he knows not whither. He lives not by his own virtue, but because he happens to function out some small cog or piston of that intricate machine whose course he can never alter, whose destiny he can never understand. He performs his task, and is part of the onward rolling of the wheels. Religion and morality teach him to walk straightly in the path of his subjection. He survives by virtue of their wisdom. Stripped of them he would be but a bleeding fragment of humanity, for man is not yet permitted to live as an individual, and it has been but the dream of the greatest among men to live as arbiters of their own law, as creators of their own values.

When a man is taken out of the civilization in which he has been taught to exist and is told to

live as best he can by the strength of his individual will, the bonds forged and held together by his old manner of life are gradually loosened. The religion and morality which he has been taught, which are not his, but belong to the society of which once he formed a part, fall away and there is left only that stripped and raw nucleus of life which lies so close to the brute from which it was evolved.

While Sherwin had lived on Kanna Island he had found no aids to hold him to the standards of his former life. Formerly, he had lived by other men's opinions and had found his place easily enough among the rough and tumble life of a young colony. Now he was altogether alone and without another white man, he had not even a woman who could help him crystallize and make concrete the sense of his own personality. The black men among whom he lived were of little help, for they too were outcasts living far from their native land. Coffee perhaps was more pitifully an outcast than any of the others, and Sherwin saw in the black fellow's helpless isolation a reflection of his own ever-increasing loneliness.

During the time that his hand had been poisoned, he had suffered the agonies of despair, and at times had grovelled in fear, blinded and appalled by nature's cruel indifference. Later he

had tried to look away and forget that glimpse of reality; but he could never forget. Fear had then entered into his soul, fear that weakened and harassed and made him grasp at the easiest mode of existence. Again on the night of the hurricane he had lain in terror on the sand-hills, and had felt himself equal in feebleness with the despised natives. Now, no longer by any right of superiority of race, but only by his greater strength and brutality could he rule them. Yes, and he feared Hicksey too, and envied him the supports that he himself had lost. He cursed him for taking away his last means of asserting power, for he had grasped at power as at the one plank by which to float. If daily he could be reminded of his power, he might still find support. But here Hicksey had stepped in with his cool authority, and rather than be under the direction of another man, Sherwin would follow the line of least resistance and live in what pleasure he could find from day to day.

It thus came about that Sherwin degenerated from the keen hopeful man who twelve months earlier had landed upon the island, to the gloomy and savage being who from time to time let show fierce strains of cruelty and lust. The bonds by which society had held him were being loosened and would soon fall away.

As the days passed, Sherwin felt their dull sameness to be piled against him till they formed the upward slope of some great mountain that he could never climb. He thought that he was now indifferent to anything that they could bring. Part of him hoped to escape and to leave for ever the island, and part of him knew that he could not rise to the effort of a change. Then quite unexpectedly the dull line of monotony that stretched above him became taut and snapped, and life, imperative and vigorous, came with crude problems and urgent questions.

He was sitting in his room one afternoon when Coffee came to the door and told him that he had sighted in the distance the sail of Hicksey's boat. Sherwin was at the well-worn and ceaseless occupation of turning over the leaves of newspapers that he knew by heart. He was a little tipsy, for he had had several glasses of whisky, and at the time took small notice of the announcement, but later, for want of anything better to do, he went out to watch the arrival of the boat.

When he saw that there were two figures on board, he stood still and stared in astonishment. Then his heart beat with a thump against his ribs as he recognized that one of them was a woman. The first words that sprung involuntarily to his lips were a curse against the doctor and his folly

in bringing a woman to the island. He felt his heart beat quick and sudden in his breast and knew that in the last few seconds the aspect of his life had been changed. The first thought that struggled to clearness out of the turmoil of his brain was that he must wash and tidy himself. Close on its heels came the thought that if he did so the doctor would notice and laugh at him. But why should he not tidy himself for a lady? Then again he cursed the doctor. Yes, he would tidy himself, there was just time for that before the boat arrived at the harbour.

He set off towards his house at a run. Then he clipped his beard and washed his face and neck. He felt strangely different after these unusual exercises and a little ashamed of himself. No doubt, too, that he was pleased and excited, and yet somewhere at the back of his mind he was annoyed. When he arrived on the beach the doctor had already grounded his boat and was carrying Alice Desmond through the surf.

Sherwin had not seen a woman for more than twelve months, and, now that he was so close to one, became morbidly embarrassed. He found himself singularly ill at ease and conscious of his newly titivated appearance. He longed to look, and did not know how to look. Damn it, there could be no harm in looking at the woman! He

stared awkwardly, till Hicksey told him to give a hand with the boat.

He told Coffee to carry up his boxes and then walked away with her towards his own house. Sherwin was left among the blacks to stare after them. Again he silently cursed Hicksey, and this time included the woman in his malediction. He sent the natives flying on different errands, scattering them in all directions. They knew that when he spoke in that tone it was best to obey smartly. When he was alone he walked along the beach, not heeding where he went. He had in his mind no definite desire or plan of action, but through his brain there raced pictures of vague possibilities, of unformed schemes, incomplete visions. Vague forces stirred within him and sudden violent attributes of life had been awakened by the half-contemptuous, half-frightened look on a woman's face.

For the next few days Sherwin had small opportunity of seeing anything of Alice Desmond. She stayed nearly all the time in the house, and only twice went with Dr. Hicksey to the hospital. On both occasions Sherwin made excuses for being there, but he had no opportunity of seeing her alone, and he found that his embarrassment had in no way abated. When he was away by himself, thinking about her, he was bold enough, and

he would spend much of his day watching the doctor's house from the high dune that separated it from his own. All his instinct urged him thus to spy upon her, and he vaguely wished that he might see her alone to talk to her, though what he would say on that occasion he had not yet planned. In the meanwhile he watched for his opportunity.

The opportunity at length came, when one day he saw her leave the house, and, instead of walking towards the hospital, walk in the other direction along the beach. He watched her cross the beach and then mount the cliff on the other side, then she disappeared from his sight. He determined to follow. He kept behind the sand-hills, but gradually got nearer and nearer. For a while he wondered why she was walking in that direction, then the obvious explanation occurred that she was merely walking for pleasure in the cool of the evening. Till she was farther from the house he could keep out of sight, then perhaps he would show himself, he would speak to her, make her recognize his existence.

Alice Desmond had walked more than half a mile from the house before she checked to look down from a cliff-top into the clear pools of water in the dead-coral rock at its base. As she stood watching the shadows of the rocks lengthen and stretch out across the sea she suddenly felt that she

was being watched. She did not know from where, but some sense told her that eyes were keenly following her movements. She looked round but could see no one. For a few steps she continued her way, then quickly she turned and saw Sherwin's red face disappear behind a bush. She was frightened. What could the man want? Why was he following her? She turned and hurriedly began to retrace her steps. Sherwin, seeing her intention and fearing that he might lose his opportunity, broke his way through the bushes and ran to cut off her retreat. Panting from his exertions and flushed with excitement he stood barring her way.

For some moments they stood looking at each other. The woman was by this time pale and frightened. She spoke with a slight quaver in her voice. "What do you mean by following me like this? Let me pass, please."

Now that it had come to a personal contest, and he was face to face with her, Sherwin's shyness and embarrassment were all gone. The fact of her sex no longer abashed him; it rather brought out all his natural bravado. "Not so fast, please, I've come for a talk with you. It's not often I have the pleasure of seeing a lady on this island."

She looked at him and then away on either side. On one side there was the cliff, on the other thick

bushes. Then she came a step nearer. "Let me pass, please, I don't want to talk to you."

He stood blocking the way.

"Help! help!" she screamed.

He laughed at her. "It's no use screaming against this wind, no one could possibly hear you."

"I beg you to let me pass."

"Certainly, my dear, but you must give me a kiss first."

She stood breathing hard, white and trembling. As he came towards her, she watched him as some fascinated animal watches the approach of a snake.

Suddenly he caught her in his arms and kissed her. With a half scream she struggled to arm's length striking at his face; then she ducked out of his grip and ran towards the house.

Sherwin had received a smart blow on the cheek and was surprised at her sudden movement and her strength. He shouted an oath and ran a few paces in pursuit, then, seeing that she was near the top of the hill, gave up. For a time he stood biting his lips, then he walked moodily away across the island; he would let things settle down an hour or so before he again made his appearance.

Nurse Desmond, frightened and trembling, hur-

ried on across the sand-hills. When she reached the doctor's house she found it empty. She went on to the hospital, where she found him at work. She was very much excited and flushed. "I want to speak to you at once," she said, "somewhere where we can be by ourselves."

"I can't come just now," said Hicksey, intent on what he was doing. "This is important. I shan't be finished for an hour."

"But I must speak to you at once," she insisted. "Please come. I really must speak to you."

He saw now how excited she was, so he left his work and went out with her. She led him some distance over the sand-hills before she told him of her encounter with Sherwin. In the first flush of his anger he thought that he would at once dismiss the man, then, as he listened, it dawned upon him that, should he dismiss Sherwin for making love to his mistress, it would place him in a false position. At any rate, he could speak as man to man with the fellow and tell him to keep his hands off. For some moments he said nothing, but stood thinking out the situation.

She was anxious and disappointed at his silence, for she had expected some direct show of sympathy and an immediate promise of revenge. "You must dismiss him at once," she urged. "I can't stay on the island while that brute's here,"

Hicksey tried to explain why he could not dismiss the man.

"But I simply can't stay here while he's about; I'm sure he's dangerous."

"No, dear, I can't dismiss him, but I can make him understand that if he troubles you, it will be the worse for him."

She stood looking at Hicksey, her eyes full of reproach and disappointment. This was not how she had expected him to behave. He had shown no sympathy, had never seen her point of view, but was merely occupied with his own personal difficulties that the situation had raised. As he turned to go back to his work she burst out crying: "Don't you see I depend on you. I've sacrificed everything. I'm all alone; you must protect me."

Hicksey turned to her with a shade of annoyance; he never could stand tears of any sort.

"I promise that the man shall not annoy you again; but surely you must see that I cannot dismiss him" Then after a pause he added: "It was unwise your coming to the island, I never foresaw this."

She was still shaken with sobs.

"You must go back to the other island," he said.

"Yes, take me back at once; but there, when I am alone—O my God, my God, I am unhappy."

Hicksey had not sufficient penetration to see any cause for this sudden outburst of misery. "Come," he said, "it's not as bad as all that. I'll shake the fellow up; I'll make him understand that he's to keep his hands off; but clearly I can't dismiss him."

"Then you'll take me away."

"Yes, I'll take you away as soon as I can."

"When will that be?"

"It's damned annoying all this. I've got a lot of work to do now; I shall have to stay here for another week."

For a moment she checked her tears. She looked at him in astonishment, marvelling that he could be so callous to her need. Then almost coldly she asked, "Please take me over and then come back again."

"I can't," he said; "that would waste three days, and I have a great deal of important work to do. I can't play at my profession; but I tell you I'll make things safe for you."

She suddenly flared out at him: "You don't love me, you don't love me a bit! Oh! why did I come here, why did I come here?"

She dropped on her knees on the sand, and then fell forward shaken with sobs. This was the first scene of the sort that Hicksey had ever experienced, and he was not pleased with it, neither was

he taking it very well. At that moment he was prepared to admit her accusation, and he was as unable as the unhappy woman to supply an answer to her question.

With flushed, tear-stained face she accused him. "It's always your work. You care for that far more than you care for me. You'll never give up the least little bit to please me."

As he looked down at her, he felt strangely degraded by the whole scene, and was ashamed of himself for being stung to answer this last accusation. "I've given up all my work, all my work that really mattered. I must at least do what I'm paid to do."

"You don't love me, you don't love me," she wailed.

At this he was exasperated. "Alice, do try and be reasonable. I've given you my word; do try and have a little faith in me."

She made no response to this. He stood looking at her for some thirty seconds. Then, as if to close the matter, "Anyway, I've got my work to do, and I'm going to do it." He began to walk away towards the hospital.

At once she scrambled to her feet and ran after him.

By the time they came to the hospital, she had pulled herself together. For a time she sat watch-

ing him at work, then he called to her and gave her some bandages to roll. He was still ruffled and annoyed, and as he now and then caught sight of her, he marvelled that only four months ago, the charm of that same woman, occupied at the same task, should have driven him out into the night. The thought of that night came with a pang. He remembered all his fine resolutions, and as he looked at her sitting there, so dejected and obedient, he admitted that she was not worth the sacrifice.

At supper that evening they both felt awkward and strained. Hicksey was annoyed because he had spent an hour looking for Sherwin and had failed to find him. Alice Desmond was nervous and ill at ease wondering where the man had got to. She also felt that she had lost ground with the doctor, that perhaps she might never be able to make up. There was suddenly some barrier between them that she could not surmount, that she did not even know how to approach. She hated Sherwin the more passionately for being the cause of her misfortune, and all the while there was on her a singular dread as to what the wild, fierce-looking fellow might do.

## CHAPTER XIII

THERE is about a tropical night a disposition of relaxation and pain—the more patent activities kindled by the sunlight have ceased, and all living things accept eagerly a respite from the hard brilliance of the day. Not only the stars but other unapproachable realities are now revealed. The curtain of light has been drawn aside, and behind one can discern the ever-fructifying genius of life pushing upward, ceaseless and deliberate. All things would fain rest, but there is no rest, only relaxation; for to rest is to die, and in that knowledge there is pain. The power of death is now more clearly revealed, and life which grows upon its own decay.

Over Kanna Island such a tropical night now rested, stilling its human activities. In a long and irregular line the land spread itself beneath the pale moonlight. The coral reefs with the waves breaking amongst them showed white and black like lace stretched on velvet. The land stood grey and definite, in the ambient haze, in some places rising to high cliffs and headlands,

hill-tops with rough boulders, in others bending to smooth sweeps of blown sand and undulating dunes. The thickets that spread over its surface filled the hollows and valleys, and the spiked clumps of spinifex grass showed white in the moonlight against the grey sweeps of sand. The houses of the white men looked now very small and insignificant. They seemed dwarfed by the high sand-hill that rose between them. The white surface of the roofs caught the moonlight and showed in marked contrast with the dark shadows that they cast.

At the north point of the island there is a long flat sand beach where turtles bury their eggs. Close along the break of the waves there is a white ridge composed entirely of small fragments of broken shells. This ridge was touched by the moonlight and shone brightly. Along its edge Sherwin was walking up and down, to and fro. He walked to its extremity and then turned and walked back. Again and again he paced its length. The waves, now and then, washed over his feet, but of them he took no heed. His eyes were directed straight in front of him on the white line of the ridge, and when he reached its limit he turned and retraced his steps. There was only a faint breeze and the night was very still now. A silence gentle and powerful enveloped all the

land. The man upon the beach and the waves that broke at his feet were alone restless. Incessant and monotonous the waves drove against the shore, building and destroying the line of fragments upon which he walked. Once he stopped and dipped his hands in the water, which was warm as his own blood. As he straightened himself, it seemed as if he lifted on his shoulders the weight of the tropical night; then, again as if mesmerized by its whiteness, he paced along the line of the beach.

All that evening he had wandered over the island, and instead of returning for his meal he had walked farther and farther from the houses. Now he had come to the end of the land.

There were forces moving in him of which he had no previous experience. They had driven him onward till he had been checked at this furthest limit by the ever-moving and passionless sea. Where they would drive him next he knew not, but only that they gnawed and tortured, and that the pain of the night and the pain of the tropics mingled with that of his own soul.

Besides pain and discontent, there was in his mind fierce justification for all that he had done, for all that he could do. Why then so mildly submit to the torture of indecision? There came a sudden sense of his extraordinary isolation.

He was alone in the midst of a sea, on the borders of a foreign continent, and there were unknown devils raging in his heart. He had a glimpse, a flashing remembrance of his boyhood, his friends and relatives in England; that unclouded time was infinitely remote. The contrast to his present state was too terrible to be faced. It was bad enough, God knew, to be on this cursed island, but what devils of fear and lust should drive him thus to the very edge of existence? Should he step right over the edge, out into the waves and there be drowned, and thus cool his raging appetite? No, his instinct of life was too strong for that. He suddenly swerved from his path, crossed the wide beach and forced his way between the prickly acacia bushes. He cared little for their thorns, but walked headlong on, making as straight a line as he was able for the settlement. The fever of his emotion carried him through the thickest scrub, the empty desolation of the land urged him to hasten on toward proximity. He took no thought for what he would do when he reached the houses.

He skirted widely the native camp, for he feared the dogs might hear him, and, like most walkers in the night he had a dread of any sudden noise. As he neared his own house he saw that there were no lights burning. The outhouse at the

back, where he knew Coffee slept, was also dark. He thought the time must be between one and two. Every one no doubt was asleep. He stood still for some moments looking at his own house, then he skirted the high sand-hill leaving it behind on his left. In the doctor's house there were no lights either. They must be in there together, asleep. He slowly and cautiously approached. The moonlight was very bright; he did not wish to be seen. Both doors were shut, but the windows were wide open.

In the house there were four rooms. On one side of the central passage there was the sitting-room and the room used by Hicksey for experimental work. The two on the other side were bedrooms, their windows opened on to the verandah, and they had a door opening between them. He tried, without mounting the verandah steps, to look into one of the windows. He was mortally afraid lest Hicksey should see him, and yet he was urged by some blind and pressing instinct thus to expose himself. From the house came no sound and he could see nothing except the clear-cut black and white planes of its squat form. He shook his fist at the black aperture of the window and muttered low curses. Then he walked several times round the house, keeping close to it and stepping softly on the sand. He

wrenched up a stake that had once made part of a fence. Again he paused, this time opposite a side window of one of the bedrooms. He peered over the sill; as he touched it with his fingers, his knuckles rattled against the woodwork. He noticed that he was trembling violently and that he was drenched with sweat. He drew back and knelt down on the sand, then lay at full length face downward. He struggled for breath, as he had struggled on the night of the hurricane. It came in hot, long-drawn gasps, and left his body empty and quivering, shaken with cold. The devils within had him now helpless and crushed. He lay there indifferent to all things but the pitiless cruelty of their attack.

In at the open window there floated the expectant hush that follows midnight. Alice Desmond woke with a start, sheer terror possessed her. She was crushed and struggling under some intolerable and suffocating weight. She lay rigid with apprehension and strove to grasp the immensity of her dread. It sucked away her breath and pressed upon her heart. Feebly her mind tried to compass its bulk. It swelled and enveloped her. Her consciousness strove to assert itself, but naked fear stretched and towered beyond its grasp. She lay still with her eyes wide open, then ardu-

ously her senses took in the facts of the room. There was the window, and there was the door that stood open into the doctor's room. It was lit up by moonlight. She herself was lying there in the bed, no one was touching her, no one was holding her down. She was free to move if she dared. But as yet she dared not move, she could only hold her fear from pressing too painfully upon her heart. Sherwin's red face and beard was the chief image of her terror. She knew that he was near, somewhere quite close; he might almost be touching her, she felt so strongly his presence. He might be within an arm's length and yet she could not see him, though she could see clearly all the objects in the room. No! she dared not call for Hicksey. The silence was almost a protection which she might not break. Gradually she gained courage to move her head and peered round. Yes, the room was quite empty. By listening intently she could hear Hicksey's easy breathing in the next room, and yet dared not call. She imagined that she could hear another sound. Yes, she knew for certain that Sherwin was somewhere near. A wave of anger came to her that he should thus dare to outrage her slumbers. Without sound she raised herself in bed. Then, quickly kicking off the bed-clothes, she slipped to the floor. As she crossed the room,

the creaking of the boards made her heart jump. When she reached the doorway, she peered cautiously through. There was no one there but the doctor, and he was asleep. She walked to the head of his bed and stood looking down at the sleeping man. Now that she was so close she hardly liked to disturb him, but her dread was still on her. She put a hand on his shoulder and shook him gently. He opened his eyes and stared; then, recognizing her: "What is it?" he asked, and impulsively lifted himself in his bed.

She put a hand on his mouth and whispered, "That man! He's somewhere about. I feel sure he is."

"Where is he? Did he try to get into your room?" demanded Hicksey, who was not to be silenced.

"I don't know."

"Did you see him or hear him?"

"No, but I know he's somewhere near."

"But if you didn't see him, how do you know?"

"I don't know, but I do. I had a horrible dream."

Hicksey was puzzled. "You're nervous. Damn the fellow for upsetting you. You must have imagined it all. He'd know better than to be prowling about at this time of night."

"But I know, I know; I'm quite sure of it."

"Well, I'll have a look round, then we'll soon see, and if he is, it will be the worse for him."

Hicksey jumped out of bed and began to shuffle on his slippers. She clung to him. "Be very careful. Please be very careful. I'm sure he's dangerous."

"Oh, nonsense. If I find him anywhere about, it's I who will be dangerous." He struck a match and lit a lantern, that he used for finding his way along the path to the hospital when he had occasion to go there in the dark. He walked towards the door.

"Hadn't you better take your revolver?" she ventured.

He turned and laughed, then mockingly he lifted in a half caress a handful of her hair. "What is the matter with you, Alice? Do you suppose the man's a savage?"

"Pray God it will be all right!" she said.

For a time that seemed to him indefinite Sherwin lay face downward on the sand, oblivious of everything but the pain of his emotion. Then abruptly he became conscious that there was movement in the house. There were voices. Distinctly he could hear Hicksey's voice. He turned on his side and looked at the house. He saw the reflection of a lighted match. Scrambling to his

feet he went round to the front where there were thick bushes behind which he could hide. He heard the creaking of the boards, then the door opened and Hicksey stepped out on to the verandah holding a lighted lantern. Alice Desmond stood behind him. She was in her nightgown and her dark hair hung over her shoulders.

Sherwin drew in his breath and grasped at the stake that he carried. The doctor put his hand on the railing of the steps and began to descend.

From out at sea there came a far-away holloa. Then close following came another. Both men turned to look. Out in the harbour they could see a light.

Hicksey spoke to the woman. "Are you sure it wasn't old Pomfrey you were dreaming about, for that's the cutter just arrived. I wonder what he means by turning up this time of night." He held the lantern up. The light on the boat waved to and fro, to show they had seen his signal. "It's just as well you did wake me. He'd find it difficult to find the moorings without a guiding light."

Then again the stillness of the night was broken by a shout from the boat.

Suddenly and unexpectedly Sherwin's fever left him. The call from the sea had pierced the spell of the tropic night. It was a message from the civilized world and spoke of all the sanity of exist-

ence, of all the woven veils that hide the sparks of madness. It carried on its two notes a sanction to all that complicated and intricate system. In the great world of men there still existed churches and parliaments and public-houses and brothels, the wheels still turned one upon another. In Sherwin it touched some hidden spring and he was once more conscious that he was a civilized man. Who was he that he should prowl in the night with promptings of rape and murder in his heart? Once more he was cool and composed; there were still links between himself and the world he had left. He had a buoyant, almost happy desire to run down to the beach and greet the old man and hear from him the latest news. He crept through the bushes, making his way towards his own house. As he went, he felt ashamed of the sharp throes he had just experienced.

Hicksey walked round the house and peered behind the bushes. "Well, you see there's no one about; it was all your imagination."

"It was more than that," she said. "I felt him touching me; it was horrible."

Hicksey looked at her, puzzled, for some moments, then he changed the subject. "I suppose Pomfrey must have been becalmed. Anyway, there's no need for me to see him till the morn-

ing. So if you are satisfied that no one is there, I'm going back to bed, and I advise you to do the same."

Silence settled once more upon the island, broken only by the scuttling of the wallabies disturbed by Sherwin as he forced his way through the bushes.

## CHAPTER XIV

WHEN Sherwin neared his house, he sent the stake that he was carrying rattling against the shanty in which Coffee slept. The black turned out, rubbing his eyes. "There's the boat just come in, Coffee," he shouted; "you run down and help pull up the dinghy. Tell Mr. Pomfrey I'll be down in a minute or two."

He went inside and washed and changed his shirt, which was torn in several places by the thorns through which he had so hotly pushed. As he hurried down to the beach, he felt already a different man. He met Pomfrey just where the dunes slope to the beach. The old man was plodding his way towards the house. "What makes you turn up at this time?" he asked.

"You may well ask that!" Pomfrey snorted. "First I've had a head wind, then it fell dead calm. I've been thirty hours getting across and it's not many more miles than that. I'm glad they had that light up at the house. I couldn't have picked up the moorings without that." Then with a chuckle: "Has the doctor brought the new matron across? Ay, I thought she'd be

gone on him. They say she's not a new hand at the game either."

Sherwin laughed boisterously. "Come up to the house and have a drink. It's not too soon before breakfast."

"Ay, I could do with a drink." Then feeling in his pockets, "I think I have a letter for you. Yes, here it is." He handed Sherwin a fat envelope.

When they had reached the house and drinks were served, Sherwin opened his letter. For some minutes he became absorbed in what he read, and Pomfrey sipped at his glass. Then in an exclamation Sherwin broke out: "By G——, he's struck it at last!" He turned to Pomfrey eagerly. "Have you heard of this new find they talk of—The Parrot? It seems a good thing. My brother—I told you he was on the fields—he's pegged out a claim close by."

Pomfrey suddenly caught his companion's excitement and leant across the table. "Then he's struck something good. No mistake, the Parrot's all right Every one is talking about it. It's the richest find they say that there has ever been in the colony. Why, only yesterday I saw in the paper that they'd found two hundred ounces to the ton; something wonderful—mullock held together with gold."

Sherwin jumped up from his chair and leant across the table, flattening out the letter under Pomfrey's face. "Two hundred ounces did you say, twenty he says here. See here, this is what he says about The Parrot." He read out loud: " 'They found ore on the surface giving six ounces to the ton, and at fifty feet in the shaft the borings gave twenty.' Now listen to this." He turned over the page, following the lines eagerly with his finger: " 'I've taken up three acres on the main ridge about two hundred yards from the claim, as close as I could get. The reef runs in that direction.' "

Sherwin's face was burning with pleasure; both men were excited, as men always are over the discovery of gold. Pomfrey fired questions. "When did he write that? How deep did he say they were? Fifty feet? The last I heard they'd reached a hundred, getting richer and richer all the time."

Sherwin's elation carried him beyond himself. His brain whirled with dreams of wealth. Of course he would leave the island; the doctor and his woman could go to hell for all he cared. He read on to the end of the letter. His brother told him that he had employed a man to help him sink a shaft, and that as soon as he found any metal he would let Sherwin know. Then, not till then,

would he want him. In the meanwhile he would need all the money Sherwin could send. He added that on the surface he had found a few stones that showed a colour, and he had no doubt, since they were on the direct line of the ridge that, lower down, there was good stuff.

Sherwin's spirits were a little dashed that he was not to leave the island at once. But he decided to give notice and leave at the end of the quarter. Then, no doubt, his brother would have found gold and all would be well.

The two men talked till dawn about the wonderful Parrot gold mine. Pomfrey told him there were companies forming in the capitals of the different states, and how they were taking up land all round the mine, and that even a London company was involved. "It's the richest thing the colony has ever struck," he repeated. "If your brother is on the right line then you're a rich man. No need any longer to live on in a place like this."

They drank success to The Parrot and to Sherwin's claim; then, as the day dawned, the old man went back to his boat.

When Sherwin was alone his excitement would not let him sit still. He walked up and down the room talking to himself. The experiences of last night were very far removed, and now that the sun was rising he could hardly believe in the existence

of all that misery. As he walked up and down, he made plans for his future life. It would be so dazzling as to be well worth these months of isolation.

He called to Coffee to come and lay the table. The black's enigmatic and sad face struck him as droll, he had never before seen how droll it was. His spirits were so high that he couldn't help knocking Coffee about a little in a friendly way. He dug him in the ribs. "Get on, you old image, quick with breakfast." He smacked his black, shining shoulders, and shook him and tripped him up, and finally sent him spinning out of the door with orders to bring bacon enough for two. Then he allowed Coffee to sit down on the floor and eat his meal in his presence, a thing he did not often allow.

After breakfast he wrote to his brother, and took out from his cash-box forty pounds in notes for current expenses. It was good to handle even that little worth of money. Money—that was the stuff to bring a man back to his senses. Why, it was the blood of civilization; and, if their claim was as good as The Parrot, and there was no reason why it shouldn't be, then they ought easily to make a hundred thousand. His imagination raced ahead into the future, playing with extravagant fancies.

It was while he was thus occupied that Hicksey walked across the verandah and knocked at his door. Sherwin saw in an instant that there might be trouble, but this morning he was not in the least apprehensive. He had no fear of the other man; he had suddenly been raised above that.

"Good morning, doctor," he greeted Hicksey as he entered. "I've had some news by the boat. Pomfrey brings a letter from my brother, that says he's taken up a claim on the fields and wants me to join him. I shan't be sorry to leave this place; I've had enough of it, so I shall clear off at the end of the month, which makes the end of the quarter."

Hicksey was a little taken back at this development. In face of this information, he found it difficult to be as angry as he had meant to be. "I'm glad to hear you're going, that makes things all the easier. But I'll tell you what I came here to tell you, that if you bother the matron again in any way it will be the worse for you. She tells me you were up to some devilment yesterday. You must stop it. Do you understand?"

Sherwin turned scarlet. "There's no need to talk like that, Dr. Hicksey; I never meant any harm by the lady." Then he finished rather lamely: "I'm sure the lady knows I didn't mean any harm." He was a little ashamed of himself

of seeming so cowed, but it didn't really matter what he said. The whole thing was now so utterly unimportant—why in a month's time, he'd be in a position to buy the islands and the hospitals too, not to mention any woman his eye might fancy. He went on: "I'm sorry if I gave any offence; none was meant; and now that I'm leaving the lady needn't be afraid."

Now in his turn Hicksey was a little uncomfortable; he felt as if he might have made too much of a trifle. After all he didn't know what had happened, it might have been the merest nothing. Now that he had said what he had come to say, he went on to speak of other things and listened in his aloof boyish way to an account of Pomfrey's late arrival, and even questioned Sherwin about his letter from the gold fields. He was now rather inclined to believe that Nurse Desmond might have exaggerated the whole of yesterday's affair. He reflected that one never could tell with women what they would imagine, and remembered what a fuss she had made in the night from sheer imaginative nervousness. He even felt a little sorry that he had spoken so sharply to Sherwin, tried to make up for it by unbending a little and asked questions about his mine. He felt that the man had come with a jump nearer to him, that he was clothed in new possibilities, might very possi-

bly make a fortune, and after all he was not so bad a fellow in spite of his sulky manner.

As Hicksey walked back towards his house Sherwin muttered after him all the curses he could lay tongue to. If ever he got his chance he'd get back on him for talking like that.

At the doctor's house Nurse Desmond was waiting anxiously for Hicksey's return. She ran out to meet him and was so eager to hear his news that she did not notice the look of annoyance on his face.

"What did you say to him? Have you dismissed him?" she queried.

"No, he's dismissed himself. He got a letter—Pomfrey brought it over—that tells him his brother has found gold, and he's going at the end of the month. There's been some big find, and his brother's pegged out a claim close by. I wouldn't be surprised to hear that they had got on to a good thing."

She was silent for a moment, then she said: "The beast, I'm glad he's going; I hope he doesn't find any gold though."

Hicksey couldn't tell why, but this remark annoyed him more than he would have been willing to admit.

"Why do you say that?"

"Oh, I don't know. I hate him."

"Well, there's no occasion for you to see him again," he said, and felt a sudden desire to get away by himself.

She caught at his hand. "Tell me all he said," she demanded.

"Oh! there wasn't much to say; he said he was sorry and never meant any offence."

"Did you make him promise that he would never come near me again?" She held both his hands now and stood close to him. He felt a definite repugnance at her eagerness, and answered dryly as he freed his hands, "He won't bother you any more, I'm quite sure of that." Then he turned from her and walked towards the house.

She followed and caught at his arm. "What's the matter with you; are you cross?"

Again he constrained himself to hide his annoyance. "No, I'm a bit tired; I want to be by myself."

Her heart leapt in fear and apprehension. Was he tired of her? Did he love her no longer? Would she be unable to hold him? If she could not, how then would she be able to live? A sense of her utter helplessness was sharply defined. Was she to be left clinging to dreams that faded. To what then would she fall? She shrank from the picture of her own loneliness. All the conven-

tions by which a woman lives, which exist for her support and comfort, she had defied and cast aside, and now felt that in the great social order of things there was for her no place. This one man was all that she had left, and if she could hold him she was well content to have lost all else. But if he now turned away, she would be empty and hopeless indeed. Around her was the indifferent and almost hostile aspect of a wind-swept and uncultivated island, and there still moved on the surface of her consciousness the image of that red face and beard, which stood as symbol of all the untamed and savage instincts of the race. On the other island, for which she now longed as for a sanctuary, there were the two women who waited on her smallest actions with critical eyes. If Hicksey were to turn from her, where then indeed could she find a place? To what could she then hold? At the thought of this great emptiness, life seemed doubly cruel and terrible; but with his love and help she could forget all else, shut out the fears and terrors, perhaps forget that they existed—but alone! She could not dwell on the fearfulness of that thought. For a moment she held his hand and gently caressed it, then let it drop and turned towards the house. She knew that he had looked at her in surprise and then had walked away towards the hospital.

When she reached her room she shut and locked her door, and then sat down in dejection and looked aimlessly out of the window. Before her stretched the wide expanse of the sea, and in the near foreground she could see the grasses bending to the wind. Out in the harbour the boat was moored, and she could see the figure of Tony sitting motionless looking into the water. Never in her life had she felt so lonely. She looked away and regarded the few pieces of furniture in the mean small room. Then she looked at her own hands, and at the loose cuffs of silk about her wrists. She followed the course of the veins in her arm, and felt an overwhelming pity for her own body. What if he were to cease loving her; how wasted all her life would seem. She went to the glass and looked at herself. Her own eyes seemed strange and troubled. Letting down her hair she pulled it in two great waves over her shoulders. Was this all there was of her, all there was to offer? She watched the tears gather in her eyes and drop from her lashes. In the distance she could hear the waves breaking on the shore; they and all the other forces of the world were utterly indifferent to her fate. But oh, she loved him, she loved him, needed him desperately. She would never let him go. There was nothing he might not do to her, but he must love her in

return. Then came an intense desire to be near him, to follow all his actions, to watch the come and go of his thoughts. She would go and work for him, make herself ever so useful. She went to the glass and began to coil up her hair with the idea of going to help him at his work, but before she had it placed and pinned in position her heart failed her. She remembered how yesterday he had seemed so indifferent as she had sat beside him doing as he had directed. She remembered too how quick the natives were to note any passing mood or faint expression, and she felt she could not meet their scrutiny. For a moment she stood in indecision; then came the conviction that she was not strong enough for this battle. With admission of this defeat, her misery and loneliness became poignant. She flung herself on the bed and lay sobbing, hopelessly unable to restrain or to control the completeness of her despair.

For how long she lay there with her face amongst the pillows she did not know, but when the first onset of her grief had passed she turned and watched vacantly the flies spin tangles in the air. For a time she would try to follow one individually; it would approach and retreat from the other, wending its way amongst them. Of a sudden it would become madly tangled with some other, and she would not be quite sure which was

the one she was at first following. Then she would close her eyes, indifferent to their feeble and senseless activities. At midday the sun's rays struck down upon the roof, making the room intolerably hot. The resin oozed from the wooden walls and uprights, and the air was permeated with its strong scent. She lay quite still, only occasionally raising her hand to brush away the flies that settled on her face and arms. Then followed the long hours of the afternoon that slowly dragged themselves away. Vaguely she hoped that he would come. Was he so utterly careless of her? The sunlight slanted in at the window and crept across the floor, but she had not the energy to get up and pull down the blind. When the glare fell upon the bed she only moved slightly so that it should not fall directly on her face. It must be late afternoon now, and yet he had not come. Later, she heard Coffee come into the back room. She listened with half-awakened interest to his movements as he prepared the evening meal. Then she lay with eyes closed waiting for the doctor's return; surely he must come now. At last she heard his footsteps. He mounted the steps, then crossed the verandah. He came to the door; she thought he paused for a moment, then he passed by and went into the little room at the back. She listened intently to all his movements. What

was he going to do? For some minutes she heard him move things about, then she heard the uneasy clicking of the micrometer. She knew that he had gone back to his work. Was he then utterly tired of her? She remembered with bitterness that this was the usual time for their walk together. Still she lay still and made no movement. He seemed to be taking an intolerable time; would he never stop that clicking? The sun sank into the sea and the light faded; she had been alone and miserable all day, and there was no one to care. Then at last he came to the door. Finding it locked he rattled at the handle. The spell of her lassitude was at once broken. She leapt up and went to open it; as she did so her hair, which was but loosely pinned, fell in disarray about her shoulders. She unlocked the door.

"Why, what is the matter with you? Are you ill?" he said.

She could not find words to answer, but shook her head with a slight shudder.

He came farther into the room. "How frightfully hot it is in here! Why, you've never pulled down the blind!"

Still she made no answer. He looked at her, puzzled, then there suddenly came over him an unexpected appreciation of her forlorn beauty. His eyes must have shown his admiration. When

she spoke it was in an every-day and almost dry tone. "Where have you been all day? Why didn't you come earlier?"

"Oh, I've been working." He seemed to throw the words behind him. "But tell me, have you wanted me?"

She made no answer, but looked up at him with eyes wet with tears. In a sudden gust of passion he snatched her to him.

She could afford for a moment to take in her triumph, yet with an almost pleading voice she asked: "What, do you still love me?"

For answer he held her the closer. She lay unresisting in his arms, while he kissed her hot lips.

## CHAPTER XV

WHEN Dr. Hicksey brought his boat against the landing rocks at Fenton Island, he found no one there to meet him. This was unusual, as formerly James had come down to help secure the boat. He made no remark on this head to Nurse Desmond, but it was with a feeling of irritation and disappointment that he walked towards the hospital. Although he very well knew that James and the two nurses looked with disapproval upon his actions, he had not up to the present received any open censure, but now the fact that they thus failed to take any notice of his arrival could bear no other than an unfriendly interpretation. His first prompting was to reprove James for what might well be considered an omission of part of his duty, but on second thoughts he decided to make no mention of the incident.

On arrival at the hospital he found James and the two nurses at work in the central ward. Everything seemed to be in good order, different indeed from the days of Dr. Hubbard, and work-

ing with the regularity that he himself had introduced. During the two weeks that he had been away he had of necessity lost touch with the cases left on Fenton Island, and he would have to ask many questions before he could be again master of the situation. As he now stood talking to James he had an unwelcome but definite feeling that he might almost be an outsider, that the place could get on very smoothly and well without his presence. The nurses, who were working at the other end of the ward, had not even taken the trouble to greet him, and he knew very well that they were sorry that he and Nurse Desmond had returned to take over the charge of affairs. He felt that since his absence with the matron his position had become considerably weaker. The two women no doubt hated him and could make life very difficult. They had influenced James, who during his absence had enjoyed his first taste of authority. And now, as Hicksey looked along the rows of neatly kept beds, he felt that the young man beside him was only waiting to step in and take his position. His work, that once he had so loved and which had been so full of brilliant possibilities, now stretched before him, a rough and arduous path. He would find no pleasure in its dull routine, but only an escape from an uneasy conscience and self-contempt. His thought of

strongest support was that always he had been a hard worker. By work he could once more gain his own approval, and then be in a position to demand respect from the others.

After Hicksey had talked with James for some time over the general routine, he took him to his own work-room, and there told him that he was going on with the experiments on which he had formerly been engaged. He asked James for his co-operation and explained the general scheme of his work.

In spite of the influence of the nurses, James had always felt an admiration and liking for the doctor, and now that he once more showed a spark of his old enthusiasm, James could not hold back. After all it was easy to make excuses for the doctor, and he soon dropped his manner of formal politeness and listened with interest to what Hicksey said. Hicksey, for his part, was delighted to be once more talking to a man of his own class and education, and one who was genuinely interested in his work. He would have been willing now to admit that he had conducted very foolishly the whole affair with Alice Desmond. He should never have let her interfere with his work. A woman was never worth a sacrifice of that sort. He should have kept her in a more subordinate position, and never expected her to be his equal

and to share his thoughts. It was no doubt because he had treated her too generously that there had sprung up such situations between them as had occurred on Kanna Island. He determined that for the future he would put his work first, and yet, or rather by this means, establish a better relation with his mistress.

And now once more the customary routine of life went forward on Fenton Island, and the days followed one another with their repetition of small duties; and human nature, which can, after all, exist and flourish after much harassment and bruising, adapted itself to the simplest, which was at the same time the inevitable mode of existence.

The two men, in spite of the antagonism that existed between their women folk, held together with a kind of half-apologetic yet wholly grateful comradeship. Each in the companionship of the other found signs and constant reminders of the civilization that he had left. They understood each other's aspirations and failures as no woman could understand. They were like two friends watching each other resist with varying success the assaults of a common enemy, an enemy that they felt might separate them and even perhaps bring them to destroy one another. An irritation grew out of their loneliness and their enforced comradeship. The monotony of the days pressed upon

their spirits, making them taciturn and moody, and the glare of the sun on the white, arid sand-dunes made their eyes sore and their brains tired. But it was the women who were the most unhappy and discontented; and in the days of heat and tedium there grew up among them hate, jealousy, and envy; and greater than all these a passionate longing to centre all their forces on some concrete and tangible reality and find with this help an unassailable place in the world that they had left.

Nurse Desmond was the most to be pitied; she stood more alone than either of the others, who would never forgive her for not conforming to the standard by which they chose to live. Nurse Hilton made the most of the fact that she now was formally engaged to James. She talked about going over to Kaimera in a few months to get married. Her thoughts dwelt much on this subject, and it gave her a dignity in her own eyes to feel that she would then be once more in touch with civilization and with civilized institutions. Nurse Toms maintained a rigid propriety which was supported by a rather bitter tongue. As for the doctor's conduct, she could find no words to express her disapproval, and she expressed an opinion that Nurse Hilton and James should waste no time before getting legally and safely married. From neither of these women could Alice Des-

mond look for any support or sympathy. And now she knew that her power over Hicksey was weakening. He no longer allowed his life to centre upon her, but had again seriously taken to his work. Now most of his time, that was not given to the hospital, he spent in his room working at his own research. Her days passed in almost complete loneliness, for only at meal-times and late in the evening did she see the doctor alone.

These short intervals she would look forward to during the long hours of work, but often they were quickly hurried over, and the doctor was too much occupied with his own work to notice her desperate and ever-increasing unhappiness. And yet even now there were short respites, times when he came to her after his work was over, and they would walk together along the sands. Then she would try to believe that he still loved her, but she really knew that he had lost any touch of individual appreciation, and that most of his day he put her from his thoughts as something almost shameful and degrading. Two emotions in direct antagonism to one another dominated her life: one that the existence which she led was intolerable and could not last, and the other, that she could never, never give him up. How to reconcile these two she could not think, but vaguely believed that something must happen or she would go mad.

What did actually happen was far different from anything she had ever anticipated. She gained a victory, but her position became even worse than it was before.

After the doctor had finished his work at the hospital, he usually returned to his room, where he worked till supper. It was during this evening period that Nurse Desmond most felt her isolation, for it was at these times that they used to walk together along the cliffs or down on to the beaches. Her work finished, she had nothing to do and no one to speak to. To pass the time, she would sometimes walk out on to the beach by herself, but occasionally she would stay in the wards and talk to the native patients. She did not like the natives, had, in fact, a repugnance for them, and yet to talk to them gave her a forlorn consolation. There was, too, something about their resignation that touched her. They seemed to have dropped so far away from their true and savage lives, and were without any hope of ever renewing them, content to snatch what small pleasure the time could offer.

One evening while she was thus sitting talking to one of the black gins, the other two nurses happened to pass through the ward. Before going out they stopped by the door and looked back and then spoke to one another. In a hot instant of

shame Alice Desmond got a picture of the half-lighted ward, with its rows of beds in which lay black diseased savages, and of herself sitting there deserted in the twilight, sneered at and perhaps pitied by the other white women. At that picture, the mortification and pain of the last days crushed her with their accumulated weight. The door closed on the two women. No doubt they were now laughing at her forlorn state. She pictured the look upon their faces, one that she had often seen, a look that sometimes comes when we know another to be in danger or suffering while we ourselves are safe. It has in it the cruelty of the many against the few; half exultation at another's pain and half gratification at one's own escape. Then in a rush came her pride to save her from tears; it kindled to fierce anger. It was shameful that he should desert her thus. How she hated his work that stole him from her.

In his room she found him bent over a microscope. As she entered she had no fixed plan, but she contained, grasping and choking for expression, all her accumulated jealousy against his work.

She came close to him, then in a voice that was so quiet and ordinary that she was startled at it, she asked: "What are you doing?" As she saw him turn and in his cool, deliberate way prepare

to answer her question, her anger could no longer be contained. As if they were stones, she flung her questions at him, each more passionately accusing than the last. At each moment becoming more conscious of her injury and more indignant. "Why do you never come out with me now? Have you quite forgotten that I exist? Am I expected to live with the black women and never be spoken to? How do you expect me to spend my day? Have you no feeling for any one in the world but yourself? You've never loved me, you've just played with me, and now you want to throw me away. You cold egoist, you make your work an excuse for your egoism." She burst into high-pitched, long-drawn sobs.

Hicksey's chief feelings were of surprise and disgust for such a display of uncontrolled emotion. Women, he thought, should not live in hot countries, it made them too hysterical. "For God's sake," he said, "don't make that noise, the others will hear, and they'll think I'm murdering you."

She caught her breath and held down the sobs while she raved at him in a strained raucous voice. "Do you think I care what they think? What do they think? That I interrupt your work?" and she laughed. At this moment she was to him in her uncontrolled self-exposure more

ugly than anything that he had ever seen, and yet he was daunted by the savage power of her shamelessness. There was something elemental, either more or less than human, in her passion. "I hate your work," she screamed.

He had come towards her, but she dodged away. Then with a sudden flash of resolve she snatched up his microscope and dashed it to the ground.

"Damn you!" he shouted, and ran at her.

She swept the table clean of his instruments and preparations. "Don't touch me, don't dare to touch me!"

As he ran at her, she struck at him, wounding him on the forehead with a heavy ruler that she had snatched up. Her thin garments tore in his hands. Silent and panting they struggled: the woman in her abandonment fierce to destroy everything, her self and all that she loved, no matter so long as she could find some outlet for her pain, something concrete on which to wreak her revenge: the man instinctive to restrain this savage unknown enemy that threatened to destroy the sure conventions by which men live. He could no longer wince with repugnance, but must now struggle with and subdue this elemental and refractory force. At length he managed to secure her wrists. Then, as they struggled wildly face to face, she trod back on her skirt and stumbled;

they both fell to the ground. Here he could hold her powerless and gain a little breath.

The room was a tumbled mass of debris. On looking round at it, Hicksey could see that the result of the greater part of his work for the last year was there destroyed. It was work, which he knew, with sudden conviction, that he would never have the energy to accomplish again. And in his hands, under his control and powerless, was the woman who had worked such devastation in his life. He was filled with hatred. She was wild, emotional, not to be relied on, fierce to do evil: at that moment he feared her, and knew that he could never understand the thought that passed behind her eyes.

After her first fierce efforts to rise, she had lain still and watched him with a puzzling look of indifference; it seemed to him that the life in her had suddenly shrunk to a small spark, or had perhaps left her body empty, and was now living in some far-distant place and period. Then, as masterfully indignant he strove to reach even to the fringe of her thought, he saw in her eyes, life untamed, untameable and evasive. All men at all times had feared to see that sight. All civilizations had been built up to hide from them that which they least wanted to see. What was his work worth or the work of other men in the light

of that glimpse of unscreened and desperate reality? He was as a little child naked and alone. He had lived in a world of theories and of fancies, had been impressed by the truth of man's knowledge and power, mere figments of man's folly to hide his nakedness. He had dreamt that he had lived in a world of men, moving harmoniously to some definite end, had stretched forth his hands toward life, and at the first contact found himself a mere atom floating on the surface of an opaque and inscrutable wave that moved with the pulse of madness and covered, with its smooth surface, figures of despair and fear.

The heat and indignation of the struggle died away and left in its place a feeling of great loneliness. Over her face had come a curiously calm, and untroubled look. She spoke to him quite quietly. "Don't hold my wrist so tight, you're hurting me."

He relaxed his grip, but still held her, wondering whether she would struggle again. He lifted one of her hands and let it fall. It fell back limply and lay at her side.

Where he had gripped her wrist he saw that the skin was chafed and broken and the flesh swelled and discoloured. He experienced a singular, half-conscious pity that her body should thus be wounded. In all that vision of desolation and

emptiness that had been flashed upon his mind there was at least this woman who cared for and loved him. He thought of her body as something apart from the fierce powers that wrecked her. Her body was her true self, and for that, as he now looked at it, bleeding and disarrayed, he had a sudden pity. He lifted her arm and held the bruised wrist between finger and thumb. As if diagnosing some patient, he deliberately pinched the place. "Does that hurt?" he asked.

Into her eyes came back a sudden interest. Her life returned from that far country into which it had strayed. Not only did it fill her so that her body glowed with its presence, but in waves it surged towards him, flooding and enveloping his senses, drowning his reason. She did not answer, but smiling, and with eyes half-shut, looked at him under her lashes. Her fingers, that seemed to him to bear each an individual existence, had clasped his hand and were now twisting their way between his own. With one hand he still held her wrist, the fingers of the other were closely interlocked with hers. He pressed harder on her wrist and repeated his question.

"Does that hurt?"

She smiled. "Yes, a little. Why do you like hurting me? Oh! not so hard!"

If a moment before she had frightened him with

vast and terrible visions, she in this instant revealed the most intimate things both in life and in herself. Then, she had stripped his heart bare before loneliness and fear; now, with a thousand delicate and clinging tendrils, she wrapped his body and soul. He bent close over her. "What do you want of me; why have you such power over me?"

Her eyes were wide open now. She made no answer, but lay still looking at him.

Deliberately he freed his hand that she still clung to. Each finger had individually to gain its own liberty, then he put his arms round and lifted her. She hung a dead weight. Bending close he looked into the depths of her eyes which never for a moment left his face. Could he never read the thoughts that lay behind? He spoke slowly on an indrawn breath. "I love you more than my own soul, more than my own life."

She put up her arms and clasped him round his neck. He kissed her white face and throat, and even the torn strips of her dress.

"You must carry me into my room, please. I hate this place."

He lifted and carried her in his arms.

The door swung to behind them and the dim twilight settled down upon the debris of the room, which gradually became indistinct and covered

with darkness, till later the white moonlight, in a shape sharply defined by the square window casement, crept across the floor mercilessly lighting up each broken fragment.

## CHAPTER XVI

ALL manifestations and processes of life, which in times of prosperity smile on and flatter the heart of man, have concealed in the very stuff of their making a quality of awe and terror. Even the calm of a summer sea can suggest vague fears; the sunlight can appear a mysterious and ghastly thing and darkness holds all the terrors and all despair. When the day dawned and the sun flung its first sheath of rays over the island, Hicksey watched the cold grey shadows on the sand-dunes with a sense of numb hopelessness. There was in his heart only hatred and contempt, despair and loathing. Wherever he turned there was no hope to look to, not even an excuse for his own degradation. The purpose of his life lay wrecked, and he knew that he could not even pick up the fragments.

As he looked down upon the woman who still lay asleep, he looked upon all that was left. He saw her face as common and repulsive. She lay there asleep, a mere animal in the mean and squalid room. Yes, she was all that was left of

his life; he had given up all for her, and now he hated and despised her. How she had made him hate and despise himself! And that terrible vitality, that was her power and her scourge, how he had struggled with and striven to resist it, and how, by the powers of all that was ugly, had he been trampled deep in the mire! He feared something monstrous in himself that might rise up and again humiliate him. No, in the last few hours he had ceased even to fear even that. He was without hope or any aspiration. Let her only sleep on; he wished that she might die, and that he might never see her eyes again. If she were to wake he knew that she would rise and follow him blindly and desperately as on the preceding days—follow in silence with mute questioning, eyes waiting on all his movements, driving him to exasperation.

As he looked back upon the past week he saw in crude flat colours his own calamity. His work had been destroyed and he could never, he knew well, be able to cover that ground again. For years he had lived in the thoughts of his own ambition. It had blinded him to the facts of a more poignant life. It had served both as a crutch to support and as a veil mercifully to hide his own insignificance. Then in one evening this woman had come with her charm and her in-

domitable vitality and had swept away the whole purpose of his life. Now that it was gone, he tottered and fell and only with anguish could he look upon the naked facts of existence. What now dominated the dumb and painful stupor in which he moved was hatred for the woman who had helped him to his fall. He hated even his first remembrances of her, they came as reproaches of his own weakness and folly. He hated her body that both repulsed, and yet, in moments of weakness and delirium, attracted; he hated her mind which, evasive and muffled, he could never understand. And still she clung to him and exercised a desperate power over his actions, a power which he could seldom anticipate, and which each time left him hating and despising her the more.

Even when occupied with his regular work at the hospital he could not always escape. She followed near him. Her eyes ever on him with their questioning, dumb appeal. Only while she slept could he be free, and then he hated her more than when she was awake. There was about her sleep something exposed and shameless. How was it possible that this woman should be able to tear from his eyes all veils?

He left the room silently; the sun was already hot upon the sand-hills. He cast hardly a glance at the wide blue expanse of the lagoon. It was

to him merely a stretch of water that cut him off from his fellows, a barrier that he feared to cross because he had lost all confidence in life and in the future. With his eyes fixed on the track he plodded heavily across the sand that slipped from beneath his feet.

At the hospital he found James and the two nurses. He knew that if ever he gave the least opening they would be inclined to pity him, and their pity was the one thing he could not yet bear. The fact that they were awed by the completeness of his ruin they could not hide, but never by word or deed would he let them show that they were sorry for him. Hicksey greeted them curtly, and began at once his morning inspection of the patients. The regular routine of the hospital was an escape from the gnawing thoughts of regret. He was glad to have escaped for a time the insistent gaze of those eyes, whose thoughts he could never fathom.

When Alice Desmond woke it was late in the day. For the last week she had slept but little, but had waited anxiously on all Hicksey's movements. Unable wholly to understand why his face had been turned away, she still cherished a dying hope that he might yet come back. Without this hope she was utterly alone and her life lost all meaning. Her thoughts drew back in

panic from the empty abysses over which her life swayed. So every day she had watched him and most of the nights too; as if the power of her gaze might draw from him some response, might extract some essence from him that she might call her own. But at last, tired out by watching, she had fallen asleep and had slept soundly. As consciousness came back, a host of scurrying questions struggled to the surface. Why had she slept so late? What was he doing? Where had he gone? In the first waking moments she was filled with the horror of being alone upon the earth, an insignificant fraction of some monstrous and insane system. To escape from the terror of that picture she must obstinately believe in her power over the doctor. But if, perhaps, he had escaped and gone to the other island? At the thought she hurriedly began dressing, while in her brain the insistent idea that she must never again let him out of her sight struggled and tumbled amidst a multitude of smaller fears.

As she neared the hospital a dread grew on her that he might have gone. She ran over the yielding sand eager to know the worst that might have befallen. Dishevelled and breathless she reached the wards. Hicksey was at the far end talking to one of the black patients. When Alice Desmond burst open the door all turned to look at

her; untidy and ill-dressed she looked wild almost to the limit of madness. At sight of the doctor she recovered herself a little. Then, with quick steps, she crossed the ward.

Hicksey, after the merest glance in her direction, turned again to his work. The others watched to see what she would do.

Days ago all question of her authority over the other women had ceased to exist, and now they watched with half-contemptuous pity her tormented and useless suffering.

There are moments when knowledge comes with killing pain and leaves no possibility of evasion. For the last few days Alice Desmond had moved in a world of misery that was clouded with deliberate stupidity. Now in a flash, as Hicksey turned away, she saw her own detachment, and on the instant life appeared as a blinding interrogation mark. Life demanded of itself why there should be any life. Why suffering so intense, loneliness so desperate? There was no hope of any answer to that question. Despair and terror killed for a moment all feeling of individual volition.

As she stretched forward a hand to touch him, her voice sounded far away and empty. "I am here," she said. "Speak to me. I did not mean to sleep so late. Oh, speak to me." In those

words there was admission of all defeat, all that she now clung to was an infinite pity for herself.

All the people in the ward, the whites and the natives alike, were watching with interest and excitement the situation that seemed to have come so suddenly to a head. On their faces was a look of cruelty not to be concealed, the inevitable response to the nakedness of her appeal. At the same time they were ashamed and did not dare look at one another, but held their breath as if each moment might contain a discovery. All eyes were on the woman who seemed to be held together and kept from crumbling to pieces only by the tenseness of the moment.

"Speak to me. Look at me. Speak to me." Her hands fell limp at her sides.

For a moment Hicksey bent over his work and spoke to a patient; then, as if his control had suddenly snapped, he turned to Nurse Desmond: "Go, go," he shouted at her, "for God's sake leave me."

His words rekindled her spirit. "Leave you and go where? What have I to do now? Where have I to go? Into the sea and drown myself?" Her anger rose as she spoke, and the words came faster and faster. "Would you be glad to have me drowned, now that you have done with me, used me up, and thrown me aside? You have

turned my life to hell. I have given you everything and you have thrown it away, and now there is nothing left. Nothing, nothing left, and I am naked before these people, and you don't care. You have made me promises and broken them every one. You think only of yourself and make your work an excuse for your selfishness. You cold, selfish brute—you man!" She was close up to him now, panting in her anger. "Now you tell me to go. Where shall I go? Tell me that."

Surprised and rather awed by her violence he drew back. Perhaps her accusation was true, of that he could not judge; he only knew that her presence was a bitterness and humiliation. Could she not see how he hated her both in her intolerable silent watchfulness and in such outbursts of violent reproach. The look in his eyes must have told something of this thought, for suddenly, her rage all spent, she stretched out her hands. "Forgive me, oh forgive me, only love me once again and let me love you, and you can do what you like." Her hands clutched at and clung to his coat.

For some moments they stood silent looking at one another. He felt, more fearfully than his hatred, the weight of her attachment. Would she follow always, and could she never be shaken off?

"Let go"; he twisted her hands free—"have you

no shame? How much lower do you want to drag me down? You have made me waste and throw away everything, and have destroyed all that I lived for. I have nothing more to give you, nothing, nothing. Love you? You have taught me to hate you. Go, for God's sake, leave me."

She stood as if perplexed, opening and shutting her eyes, looking at him and yet beyond him. Then she raised her hands, and as if groping her way stumbled forward. Desperately she clung to him. "I cannot, I cannot," she wailed. "Where am I to go? You are all that is left to me."

A feeling of oppression, acute and at the same time numbing, beat about his heart and spread to every tissue of his body. Blindly his reason beat against blank walls. Was there no escape? Had she followed to claim him and make him her slave for always? Must he drag his life out chained to his disgrace and his humiliation, be no more a free man with a purpose and a work, but only the slave of a woman? A ray of hope came; at least he could escape to the other island, leave her and so have a period in which he could stand on his own feet and regain some of his self-possession. In his present state he was too worried, too sore to resist; escape was all that was left. He felt the cowardice of his resolve, and his

anger blazed up again, though he controlled himself to speak calmly. "Let go; do as I tell you!"

At once she dropped her hands and stood anxious before him, hoping to have pleased him by her quick obeying.

His conviction was strong that he must stoop to the meanest evasion, no matter so long as he could get away. He pulled out his watch, and looking at it seemed to reckon the chances. "In an hour's time," he said, "I can have finished this work. Stay here while I go into the other ward; at the end of an hour I will come back; then we must talk things out." He gave a quick glance towards James and the two nurses, then added: "This is not the time or place."

"You will come back and forgive all that I have said and done and not be angry any more?" She was now submissive and tender in her appeal.

He nodded his head with a familiar movement which she knew well, and which reminded her of the old days of happiness. "Yes, I'll come; wait for me here."

"Promise you will come in an hour, not later."

"Yes, I promise." With that he went out, and she listened to his footsteps walking along the corridor to the next ward.

So wrought up was she by the strain of the last few days, her misery and fear had been so great,

that she had given little thought to James and to the nurses. She now became conscious of her lonely position in the middle of the room and the fact that they were still watching. For a while she sat still, trying to place clearly in her mind the incidents of the last few minutes. She must make efforts to rise from her state of utter despondency and try to meet the situation. If she could once win back her influence over the doctor then nothing mattered, but to do that she must become cool and mistress of all her powers. The fact that she felt no shame at the violence of the last scene was perhaps her best defence. She felt, on the contrary, that she had won her point, and that her position was now stronger than before. Then came a quick resentment that the people over there should be looking at her so curiously and that they should have seen everything. She walked towards the table and occupied herself with small duties of arranging and tidying, and so robust is our human nature that now she could believe herself able to meet unabashed the gaze of any of the others. And all the while that such thoughts were playing over the surface of her consciousness, she was wondering how she would meet Hicksey, how she might win him.

For a while the work in the ward went quickly

forward. From the end of the room where James and the nurses were working they could get, through the open window, a view of the harbour. Nurse Hilton happened to look out, and saw already at some little distance from the house the figure of the doctor running across the sands. She drew Nurse Toms' attention and they both looked eagerly. Alice Desmond was still occupied at the table in the middle of the room. Although neither of the women had much sympathy for her, it was not in them to let the doctor escape so easily. He deserved, they thought, all that he could get.

Nurse Hilton walked across the room to where Alice Desmond stood. "If you want to talk to the doctor you had better be quick. He is on his way to the harbour, and I don't think he means to come back."

"It's not true. You lie."

"Go and look for yourself."

Alice Desmond rushed to the window. "Oh, my God, my God!" She clutched at her breast. "I will never let him leave me. If he leaves me I will kill myself." Her heart beat wildly, and the blood pulsed fiercely in her brain. For a moment she thought she was going to faint; then, calling on all her strength, she ran from the room and down towards the beach.

When Hicksey reached the shore, he found the tide very low. For a moment he hesitated whether he could pull the dinghy down over the long stretch of beach, or whether, to save time, he would wade out to the boat which was anchored only a few yards from the break of the waves. He decided on the latter course, and was just kicking off his shoes when he was exasperated to see Nurse Desmond come from behind the sand-dunes and run towards him across the beach. He swore to himself that nothing should keep him now. Furious and ashamed, he would let the woman know his mind. At all costs he must get out of her presence.

She ran to him and held him in her arms. In her eyes there was a look of desperate resolve. Of the reproach he had expected there was not a word. "Where are you going?" she demanded. "Why did you leave me?"

"I'm going to be rid of you. If you won't leave me, then I shall leave you. I'm tired of feeling your eyes on me all day and all night. I'm tired of the sight of you, and of the touch and the sound of you. There's work for me on Kanna Island. There I can be alone. I leave you because I hate you, because I wish I never might see you again. Let go, woman, do you hear?"

"You mustn't go. I cannot live here without you. I cannot be left alone."

He wrenched at her arms and twisted them free of his neck. Then he held her at arm's length. Wildly she begged of him. "For pity's sake, take me. I shall die if I am left alone. I love you, let me serve you, only let me be near you."

In a confused, unreasoning despair he put forward arguments that he knew were irrelevant. "Your work and your duty is here; besides you know what a fuss you made over that man Sherwin, and how frightened you were. Your place is here, and, by God, you're going to stay here!"

Again she pleaded: "Only let me be near you; I will ask nothing else. I cannot live without you."

"Then die, and damn you!" He suddenly released his hold, and, turning, ran into the water towards the boat.

In an instant she was after him. The boat was in shallow water, which came not even as high as their waists. The doctor scrambled on board, then he turned and tried to push away the woman, who had already grasped a firm hold on the rail at the stern.

"I'll drown you rather than you should come with me," he muttered.

Her face was white and drawn, and she made

no response, but held the tighter. He struck at her hands and arms, but the pain seemed to make no impression. In her agony and dread of desertion her senses had ceased to function as those of a human being, and had become as those of a drowning animal, all centred in one frantic resolve. Nothing short of cutting off her hands would have loosened her grip on the rail. This power in her, if something less than human, was, nevertheless, hard to cope with, and Hicksey felt a kind of despair as he bent over her white and suffering face. The very brutality of hitting at her bare knuckles was awful. With a curse he turned away and went forward to pull up the anchor. Painfully and still with the manner of some drowning and sub-conscious animal she clambered on board. As she lay still, close to the mast, her eyes followed his movements with apprehension. When he came aft he brutally ordered her out of his way; she obeyed submissively, trying to anticipate all his movements. In a few moments he had hoisted sail, and the boat like a live thing bent to the wind and headed its way northward.

The clear blue waves lapped the sides of the boat, and the ripples made music under the bows; the sun beat hotly on the deck and the white sail shone against the deep blue of the sky. From

time to time the man and woman looked at one another, though they spoke no word. Were they then inseparably bound together? The man rebelled at the thought, hated it, and yet could not put it away. He questioned why she should have such power over him. After all, what was she, what in the last weeks had she become but a raw and bleeding fragment of humanity, drifting without religion or morality, a being who clung to him as to the only concrete and tangible support; and even he himself stood uncertainly in a shifting and rapidly disintegrating world. He knew that she would drive him on to his destruction and to the destruction of them both. This was inevitable. He hated her presence. All that he had held to she had demoralized and made weak, and she would urge him further on the way to ruin. They were bound together by the weaknesses in human nature, and the weaker they became the more inevitably were their fates joined. At times an impulse of anger would prompt him to kill and have done with her, and then would follow feelings of pity and regret; but whether he hated or pitied he always despised her as if she were some contemptible part of himself that he would fain cut free from and be done with.

All day the boat sailed on, the sun blazed over-

head and then descended to the westward, and yet they did not speak; as atoms upon the sea they drifted alone and naked before the terrors of life unveiled.

## CHAPTER XVII

OF all things that obstruct human vision work is perhaps the greatest and the most needful. Hope and ambition may lie in fragments and even a man's physical health may be utterly broken, and yet to stave off the last humiliation of seeing himself failing and desolate he will cling to his work, and thus in an obstinate blindness refuse to recognize his own dereliction. Or it may be that as a sudden reaction from sharp disappointment he will fling himself into any work that is to his hand and so delay the full impact of his pain. Thus it was with Sherwin when he received, a few days previous to Hicksey's arrival, a letter from his brother telling him that after sinking a shaft to a depth of a hundred and fifty feet he had found no gold, that the money was now all spent; that, as there was no object in going deeper, he had given up his claim, and had started northward again in the hope of better success. After realizing with the first shock of the news that they were now both penniless, Sherwin turned to his work with a dull and vindictive energy. All his savings for the last year had been squandered. He cursed not only

his brother but the folly of his own trustfulness. His feelings were so dominated by anger that for the first few days he was stimulated rather than depressed, and he worked untiringly. At night, when his work was done, and the natives crouched about their fires glad of a respite from his bullying, he drank heavily of the whisky that Pomfrey had brought over from the mainland. So long as the cutter stayed at the island the old seaman would go up and drink with him in the evenings, and Sherwin found much consolation in being able to recount his own misfortunes and tell of the hardness of his fate. It was not till Pomfrey had made his departure, and the nights passed once more in solitude, that despair pressed slowly and inexorably on the heart of the solitary man.

For more than a year each day as it had passed had cheated and cajoled him of some fraction of his rights to the civilization and traditions in which he had been brought up; and now, after months of longing for recognized mastery over a remote and indifferent society, he found, in the cruel passage of a few days, that he had become an outcast, not only penniless, but prevented by the inscrutable disposition of his solitude from ever being able to renew the ways and customs of other men. And yet to save what fragments were left he persisted doggedly at the work imposed on

him, once a pleasure and an assurance, now, since hope was lost, his sole protection against too clear a picture of his own fall.

When one day Coffee reported that the doctor's boat was coming round the point, the news awakened in Sherwin a kind of dull interest. At any rate, nothing could make the position that he endured worse than it was, and it would be something of a relief to talk to another white man and tell again of his misfortunes.

Sherwin climbed one of the sand-hills and watched the slow approach of the white sail. For a while he did not notice that Nurse Desmond was on board, crouched at the stern. Then, as if against his will and reluctantly, a moving interest in life, that carried the semblance of hope, pulsed through his veins. It did not come as a quick response to stimulus, but slowly and in deliberate opposition to his will it rose, forcing all the doors that had been shut so resolutely by that long solitude, which daily had pressed him further and further in upon himself, in towards the centre, where lurked madness. Now the doors opened, and once more sharp pain struck through them.

He sat motionless, watching the boat approach and run in close to the shore. He saw the doctor drop the anchor over the bows and then let down the sail with a rattle. He saw him move about

the boat making things ship-shape, and all the while the woman sat watching him in the stern, only moving when the sail threatened to fall on her. Then he saw Hicksey jump over the side and wade through the shallow water; he remembered with a sudden pang how on their last visit the doctor had carried the woman in his arms. This time she followed him over the side and waded after him through the waters.

A guess at the changed relation between the two flashed through Sherwin's mind. A new interest was suddenly awake, but an instinct of caution warned him to move warily. He rose and walked leisurely over the hills towards the newcomers. When he met them, the doctor was some paces ahead, walking fast with his eyes on the track; Nurse Desmond was hurrying to keep within distance. When within about twenty yards, Sherwin stood still and waited their approach.

"Good morning, doctor; are you in a hurry this morning?" he shouted.

Hicksey, who had not seen the man, was surprised by the sudden greeting. At once he tried to assume his most casual manner, as if to hide all the thoughts of exasperation and distress that moved within his mind. "Good morning," he muttered, and pressed on. Then as if with an

afterthought, he shouted: "I suppose it won't be long now before you start for the mainland. Have you heard from your brother again?"

Sherwin had come close to him. "Yes, I've heard from my brother," he snarled, "and what do you think? It's all a damned fraud, there's nothing in it at all." His voice rose as if in anger, and yet all the while that he was speaking he was occupied, not so much by what he was saying as by the white face of the woman, who had by this time come up with them and now stood close at Hicksey's side. "There was not a bloody colour of gold in the whole concern, not a colour, though they spent God knows how much money in sinking a shaft to a hundred and fifty feet. They spent all my savings for the last eighteen months, and now write and ask me to get on with my job and politely send them some more. Damn them, they've had the last penny they shall ever get out of me!" He paused for a moment, then, looking straight at the woman, he continued: "So I shan't be leaving the island as soon as was expected. That will save the Government the trouble of finding another man for the job."

Alice Desmond looked quickly away and stood closer to Hicksey. The doctor, who had been listening with his eyes directed towards the ground, had not seen the insolent look on Sherwin's face.

He felt a negative kind of satisfaction that fortune should be hard on others as well as on himself; with this feeling there stirred a tardy instinct of comradeship for a man who was perhaps suffering as keenly as himself. He had an extravagant desire to speak of his own suffering, to make of that other man a confidant and equal.

"Have you lost everything?" he asked.

"Yes, everything; and they ask me for more, as if life here were all a damned picnic."

"I'm sorry for you. You ought to get away. We ought both to get away; this is no place for white men to live in."

Sherwin's eyes rested on Alice Desmond, whose presence seemed to be forgotten by the doctor. Sneeringly he asked: "And what about the woman? I see the lady has come without her portmanteau."

They both looked at Alice Desmond, who had nothing with her but the wet clothes in which she stood. For a good thirty seconds they regarded her in silence. She stood close to the doctor, and her eyes entreated for mercy. From neither of them could the piteous nakedness of her soul be concealed. Sherwin gave a short laugh, not so much from deliberate cruelty, but because it was the only comment with which his intellect could meet the situation.

Hicksey spoke to the woman. "Go up to the house, and I will follow in a minute."

She walked past him obediently.

When she was out of hearing, he turned angrily upon Sherwin. "You blackguard! If you think you can insult women in that way, I can soon teach you to the contrary."

"Oh, do you keep that and other privileges to yourself and teach her to run through the water after you like a dog!"

The force of this taunt could not well be answered. It was difficult for Hicksey to keep to a high tone in the face of so obvious a truth. "What happens to Nurse Desmond is not your affair," he said; "and I tell you this that if I find you molesting or in any way forcing yourself upon her, it will be the worse for you."

For some seconds Sherwin made no remark, and in the silence the doctor's words seemed to echo more flatly than at the utterance.

"I see you're a gentleman," sneered Sherwin; then, changing his tone: "Now look here, listen to what I've got to say. You're tired of her, I can see that. I've been tired of a woman myself before now. Play the game. Pass her on to me. I'll take her off your hands."

Hicksey spoke deliberately and in an even voice. "You damned blackguard! I warn you to keep

your distance if you want to keep a whole skin." With that he turned and walked on towards the house.

Sherwin watched him out of sight, then he walked to the place where the man and woman had stood. The sand was darkened by the drippings from their wet clothes. With his mind occupied with new and conflicting thoughts he kicked dry sand over the place. Hate and lust were now at work to do their worst, yet in his heart there was hope rekindled and with hope there had come fear. When all sign of the wet footmarks had been obliterated he walked away towards his own quarters.

At the door of the house Alice Desmond was waiting. She came down the steps of the verandah to meet the doctor. "What did that brute say?" she asked.

He looked at her scornfully, and without answering her question he demanded: "What the hell did you come here for? You knew very well that you weren't wanted."

Her face twitched emotionally and he thought she was going to cry again, but instead she broke out in supplication.

"Please, you must not let him touch me. Promise that you will never let him touch me. I am

frightened of that man; he is stronger and more wicked than you know. Please, please, never let him come near me."

Hicksey answered brutally: "You knew he was here, why did you insist on coming?" Then, exasperated, he raged at her: "Why, why did you come?"

She snatched at his hand and dropped on her knees. "Forgive me, forgive me once more. Tell me to do anything but leave you, and promise that you will never leave me to that man. Promise, promise!"

"Yes. I'll make him keep his distance—the hound. Now get up. Don't cry; there's no need for that. Show your obedience by doing as you are told. Go to your room. I want to be alone."

He pulled her to her feet and she stood looking at him with entreaty in her eyes. In a broken voice she pleaded: "Why do you hate me so?"

"Because I see too much of you. If I saw less of you I should like you better; and I should like you best of all if you had stayed on Fenton Island."

He walked into the house, and as he passed her she began to whimper, trying hard to restrain the rising sobs. She followed, keeping at a short distance behind him. In his room he turned and

was about to abuse her once more for her importunate fidelity when the conviction came to him that no matter what he said she would always follow, always look with those large reproachful eyes, always offer what he didn't wish to accept and call upon his pity. Like a petulant child he sat down with his back to her. She stood somewhere behind him, and he knew that her eyes were following his least movement. Then, after a few minutes, his irritation became so acute that he could sit still no longer. He rose and pretended to occupy himself with small employments. With difficulty he restrained himself from rushing at her and hurling her from the room. Must he always be persecuted by this intolerable vigilance? Cut off as he was from his fellows and from all the interest of his work, might he not even taste the solace of being alone? At all cost he must and would escape her, and for a time at least free himself from the consciousness of her existence. He went to one of the cupboards in which he kept drugs. In a kind of nervous stupidity she watched what he was doing. He mixed a sleeping draught sufficiently strong to make him sleep for several hours.

How and where he fell asleep he could not remember, but his last consciousness was of soft arms that encircled him and eyes that looked

anxiously into his own. From early that evening he slept till late the next morning, and Alice Desmond watched jealously his relaxed features. He had found for a time oblivion and escape. As she looked at his sleeping face she seemed to see, as she had never seen before, into his inmost self. It was as if in sudden revelation sleep betrayed the failure of life. She saw, as she watched through the long hours of the night, characters and suggestions of qualities that she had never before seen. There was something so powerless and contemptible about his drugged sleep that for stinging moments her love flashed into hate. How could so weak a shadow of a man be able to inflict pain? If he were never to wake, then perhaps might her suffering be assuaged. For a time she almost wished he were dead, for then she could love his memory, which could be kind, not like the unmouldable, hard reality of his waking self; besides, if ever man deserved to die, he who had so cruelly cast her aside deserved death. Then, frightened at the thought of her own forlorn state, she wished that he might wake, if it were only to curse at her. If he were to die in his sleep how terribly situated she would be! She clutched and shook the sleeping form, but he did not wake, only murmured from an open mouth.

Late in the night she must have fallen asleep,

and on waking she found the sunlight streaming into the room. Her immediate fear was, that if the doctor did not make an appearance Sherwin might come to see what was the matter. After much shaking he opened his eyes. As she looked into them she saw consciousness slowly creeping back, and with it came a look of aversion towards herself. He drew free from her hands and asked what time it was. She told him that it was late, and he seemed annoyed at having slept so long. For a time he moved about the room in a fuddled and drowsy way, but then once more the force of habit showed its strength. While he yet lived he must work, work although there was no hope, no prospect beyond the day. But how could he work in that drowsy state?

Again he went to the medicine chest. This time he took some tabloids of strychnin; that would pull him together and counteract the effect of the bromide. She watched him anxiously, never leaving his side for an instant.

While he had been moving about the room he had uttered no articulate words, but when at length he spoke to her, it was in a tone more like that of his old self than anything she had heard for some days. He told her that he was going to work at the hospital during the morning, but would come back to lunch at midday. She was

to have lunch ready for him and he would be back at twelve o'clock.

There was something so everyday and controlled about his manner that it took her by surprise, and she found it difficult to insist on coming with him, but instead walked with him a few paces out into the brilliant sunlight and then stood watching his figure climb the high sand-hill and finally disappear over its edge.

## CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN Sherwin returned to his home, he was restless and excited. For a while he stood on the steps contemplating the white expanse of the sand-dunes and the flat surface of the sea glimmering blue and purple in the afternoon light. He was annoyed at again letting the doctor have the last word. Well, his turn would come; he would make sure of that. He went into his room, opened a bottle of whisky, and took a gulp of the raw spirit. This was the stuff to hearten a man, and what he wanted was courage, courage to meet the wiry, hot-tempered man who so often mastered him. If the fellow couldn't see sense, then he could teach him a lesson. In a short time the morose mood that he had fallen into passed, and he called to Coffee. It was not his custom to let Coffee drink whisky, as he knew the violent effect that it had; but for once in a way he thought it would be fun to make the black fellow drunk. "Come here, Coffee; come and sit down, you black-limbed image," he shouted; "put some of that inside your ugly face."

Coffee needed no second bidding, for, like all natives, he took it as an honour to drink the white man's drink. Sherwin filled up his glass as soon as it was empty.

The cheaply built, wooden room in which they sat was bare save for the table and some wooden chairs. On the floor were scattered papers and magazines in all stages of disintegration, and here and there on the walls were nailed up coloured plates and advertisements. There was no other attempt at furniture or decoration. The two men sat on opposite sides of the table with the drink between them. Sherwin talked incessantly, chaffing his companion and exhorting him to drink. For a while the black was taciturn and answered in grunts and monosyllables, but gradually his eyes became bloodshot, and the veins on his temples swelled and stood out. Then as the liquor told on him, he began to sing native songs. At first Sherwin was pleased, but as the black became almost mad with excitement he told him to shut up, but Coffee sang on louder than ever. By this time he was rocking to and fro on his chair and shouting in his native tongue.

"Stop that row, do you hear?" yelled Sherwin.

The black took no notice beyond showing his teeth and shouting even louder his barbaric cries.

Sherwin rose and struck at him. In an instant

all the ancestral savagery of the black man showed itself and he struck back, a thing he never would have dared to do when he was sober. This was all that was needed to make Sherwin wild with rage. He went in with both fists, and in less than a minute had knocked Coffee an unconscious heap into one of the corners of the room. For a while he kicked at his fallen adversary. By God, he was the man to fight! Why, he could do for that little whipper-snapper of a doctor with one hand. No fear about that! It was high time, he thought, to give the fellow a lesson.

Seeing that there was no more resistance in Coffee he went to the table and filled his flask with spirit, then he set out in the direction of the doctor's house. With uneven steps he walked along the track. Before he had gone far, he found the ascent of the sand-hill very steep. Instead of keeping to the path he struck off obliquely. The sand slipped from under his feet, and in the steep places he stumbled. Before reaching the top of the hill, there came on him an overwhelming desire to rest. He thought he would lie down for a few minutes. As the white sand gave under his weight he sprawled to full length. His head was just on the level with a small bush and he became curiously and attentively interested in its branches. He lay still watching the patterns that their dark

outlines made upon the blue sea beyond. He noticed, at the same time, swelling and diminishing specks that glided between the branches and seemed to stir the sea into an uneven motion. These specks he could never quite focus; they mingled together, and then swam apart, and at last the shapes of branches became dim, and he slept.

When he next opened his eyes the sun was shining from the ever unclouded sky, and in his ears was the buzz of insects' wings. For a short space he wondered where he was, then remembrance came back. His head felt very heavy, and for a while he lay still gazing vacantly across the smooth uneven surface of the dunes.

The place in which he lay was sheltered by thick bushes, but he could see between their branches the path that joined the two houses. Presently along the path he saw Hicksey walk with his characteristic quick step, with eyes fixed on the sand. The sight of his enemy quickened his senses and sent thoughts to his dull and heavy head. He sat up and watched the doctor out of sight; then he took a draught of the raw spirit; this made him feel better, and gradually a glow of excitement spread through his body. For a while he sat still thinking of many plans, plans that started with the acceptance of vague possibilities and left off in nebulous uncertainty. He wished to per-

suade himself that he was not afraid of the doctor, whereas he knew that he was afraid. Well, time would show, and at all costs he would make a bid for mastery. He stood up and took another short pull at the flask; then he set out towards the doctor's house. Of what he intended he had no clear idea, but it would be more to his liking to talk with the woman than risk an interview with her master.

As Sherwin approached the lonely corrugated-iron building, that stood squat and blue in the sunlight, he was oppressed by the silence in the air, which hung like a muffling and protecting cloud over the earth. Such stillness he had not noticed before and it made him nervous, and yet he was afraid lest there should be any sudden noise. The white sunlight alarmed him in that it seemed not only to reveal his own deep buried thoughts, but to lay bare the future, so that he saw the inexorable sequence of man's actions, but yet could neither pause nor draw back. As he mounted the steps they creaked loudly beneath his weight; the noise made him hurry and push on into the room.

He felt as if he were wound up to action at any cost and nothing now could stop him. He had expected to surprise Alice Desmond at some household task, or perhaps to find her reading, but when he opened the door, he saw in an instant that

she had heard his approach, and he was flattered to see that she was waiting in terror and suspense to learn what he might do. She was standing upright at the far side of the room, her back against the dresser, her head thrown back, and her breasts rising as her breath came quick and short. Her eyes were fixed in mortal dread on his face, the dread of some animal that is cornered and knows no way of escape. For a few seconds he looked at her with surprised admiration. What a fool that doctor was, he thought, not to know a good thing when he had got it. He spoke in a forced, rather jocular voice. He was always jocular when he was nervous. "I just looked in to pass the time of day with you, Miss Desmond. We neither of us get too much company on this island—and thinking you might be alone," he paused for a second, "I just looked in."

Once more the silence settled upon the house, only broken by the buzz of a yellow blow-fly that rattled against the window pane. The woman still regarded him from her strained upright position.

He spoke again; this time his voice was harsh and brutal: "Come, my darling, sit down and talk to me. I've not come to murder you."

She moved to a chair that he pointed at and sat down. Then he walked to the table near

which she sat and leaned across, so that his red face came close to hers. "So he's tired of you, is he? Given you the chuck over? The damned ungrateful little rabbit!"

Her dark eyes glowed at him from a pale face, and her drawn lips moved, but no sound came from them.

"Come, don't be afraid of me," he added in a softened voice. "I'm not going to hurt you." Then, pulling a chair to the table and seating himself opposite her, he went on in a bantering tone: "He ought to be ashamed of himself letting a lady run through the water after him, and not so much as give her a hand."

As if with difficulty controlling her lips and tongue, Alice Desmond gasped, "Go away, please; leave me alone."

"That's not very kind when I come up on purpose to talk to you. Come, out with it; what have you against me? Ain't I as good a man as him?"

The woman suddenly bent forward on the table shaken and choking with sobs. The humiliation of her position came with irresistible force; it was shameful that the man she loved should leave her exposed to such insults. Then her anger rose against the doctor even more hotly than against Sherwin.

For a while the man watched her and said noth-

ing. Her shaking body seemed impotent to express the fierceness of her grief. Then, after a few minutes, when her sobs seemed not so violent, he spoke, this time in a kindly tone: "Don't take it so hard, my dear." He had for her at that moment genuine pity, and now that he felt that she was in such direct opposition, his instinct was to soften. "Don't take it so hard; I didn't mean to hurt you like that."

"Oh! leave me! leave me!" she cried. "He's treated me shamefully. Leave me alone!"

"Don't take on so hard," repeated the man. "You had much better leave him, and let him rot. If you come with me I'll marry you fair, and that's treating you handsome seeing the way you and him have been."

The woman looked up surprised and desperate. "I wish I were dead and I wish he were dead too. Oh! if only I could make him feel." Half glad at Sherwin's sympathy, she was relieved to have some one to speak to. "If I had the courage I would kill him and then myself."

For a while neither of them spoke, and the yellow fly could be heard buzzing aimlessly up and down the window.

"Don't take on so," said the man as he rose from his chair, "but stay here quiet and I'll come back in half an hour."

She jumped up. "Where are you going to, what are you going to do? Stop, I won't let you go like that! You're not to hurt him. You're not to touch him, do you hear?" She seized him by the arm.

"Who said I was going to hurt him?" growled the man, pushing his way towards the door.

With both her arms she held him.

With small effort he freed himself, but still held her hands in his Then with a sudden movement he drew her to him and held her in a close embrace. She stood motionless, making no resistance, but letting his kisses fall on her white face.

Then of a sudden the woman screamed, and thrust herself free. A step was heard coming up the stair on to the verandah. Sherwin turned with an oath and faced the door, at which, in the next second, Hicksey appeared. The doctor's face was drawn and excited. For some moments he looked from one to the other, then he laughed; but his laugh he suddenly cut short and turned fiercely on Sherwin. "What are you doing here? Didn't I tell you to keep your distance? What do you mean by skulking up here behind my back and frightening women? Where were you lurking that you got here without my seeing you?"

"Don't think I'm afraid of you," growled Sher-

win; "I'll soon show you if I'm to be bullied. I'm not afraid of the likes of you."

Hicksey came forward into the room. "Do you see that door? Well, get out of it quick, and if I see you here again or anywhere about I'll put a bullet in you."

"Get out yourself," roared Sherwin. "I'm not afraid of you. Perhaps you'd better report me to the Government than talk so high about bullets." He stepped across the room and grabbed at Nurse Desmond. "If I go I'll take the woman with me."

Nurse Desmond, however, avoided his grasp and ran to where the doctor stood; the two men faced one another, the one red-headed, broad and tall; the other slight and wiry and pale.

"Get out quick or it will be the worse for you," said Hicksey in a voice that was kept under control, but which betrayed his intense and gathered excitement.

"The worse for me!" mocked Sherwin. "You bloody white-faced little Wesleyan! you've got no power to make me go. You——" He stopped abruptly in mid-speech. The colour had suddenly left his red face; he had gone white even to the lips.

Hicksey had put his right hand behind his back and kept it there. "Get out quick and thank your stars you walk on your own feet!"

Sherwin, the fight suddenly gone out of him, walked sullenly to the door. When he reached it, he almost tumbled through in his haste to be off; then he hurried down the steps and away across the sand-hills.

Hicksey watched him out of sight, then turned to the woman and laughed. "The man's a blustering coward. Look—" he held out his empty right hand, "he thought I was going to shoot." His face twitched uncontrollably, for he had taken a large dose of strychnin and he was stimulated to an unnatural pitch of emotion. "What was the fellow up to? How long had he been here?" he demanded.

"Not long. Be careful of him." The woman seemed dazed. Then, as if understanding and volition had urgently come back, she spoke with quick intensity: "He's dangerous; he means killing. He told me so."

"Told you so? what do you mean?"

"Yes, he told me so. Oh, my God, it's all my fault"; and then, flinging herself on the doctor and clinging to him: "Forgive me, forgive me."

"Forgive me, what do you mean? What's the fellow up to?"

"Don't hold me so tight." He held her from him, and looking fiercely in her eyes he demanded: "What is there between you?"

"No, no, no, there's nothing; but he means killing. I saw it in his face. He's desperate." Then as if springing to new hopes she shouted: "Get your gun quick and kill him before he has time to get his. It's one or the other of you. For once you must believe me."

Her words and manner carried instant conviction, besides, he remembered the look on the fellow's sulky face as he had passed out of the door, and with that remembrance an unexpected gust of fear blew upon his heart. Yes, the man meant killing, and in a duel like this he would have to be quick if he meant to save his own life. "I believe you are right," he said. "Quick, let me go; there's no time to lose."

In the next room he found his rifle and slipped a couple of handfuls of cartridges into his pocket. Then he opened the magazine and filled it. The woman, who had followed, watched narrowly all his movements. His heart was beating wildly, and there was no denying that he was very nervous. "I must get away quickly among the dunes," he said. "If he comes back and finds me in the house he'll have me at his mercy."

"But where am I to go?" faltered the woman. "Don't leave me alone, for God's sake, don't leave me alone."

"What? You can't come with me. I must move quickly to get a shot at him somewhere among the dunes. You must stay here. I'll watch the house and not let him come near."

She clung to him. "God protect you," she wailed. "Come back soon."

"I'll come as soon as I can; here, let me go."

"Give me a kiss first. Forgive me if it is all my fault."

"Oh, damn!" He gave her a perfunctory kiss. He opened the door gingerly and looked nervously along the path, then ran towards the high ground at the back of the house and disappeared amongst the sand-dunes.

## CHAPTER XIX

THE high sand-dune that stood between the two houses was an outlying spur to the main ridges which formed the back-bone of the island and which ran in long lines north and south. In one of the gullies of these inland dunes Hicksey paused for rest and breathing time. Here he was secure from immediate danger, and here he must make a plan of action. Looking round, he could see nothing but the sky and the soft undulating sand, and here and there dwarfed xerophytic plants that sent long roots down into the dry and crumbling soil. He looked anxiously towards the crests of the higher dunes that overlooked his position. No it was not probable that Sherwin would have yet reached the high land. He was most likely, thought Hicksey, to creep round the big dune and, then from some safe position lie watching the house. In that case Hicksey, by keeping high on the main ridge, would be likely to surprise him. He started to run forward among the hills, crouching low and taking care never to appear on the skyline. In a few minutes

he reached a high crest that commanded a view of the house and an oblique elevation of the dune round which Sherwin must approach. He then lay down and waited.

The day was one of supreme stillness and peace. The sun, high overhead, fiercely flung down its rays upon the white surface of the earth, that in a shimmer of heat trembled beneath its blows. In the distance the sea and sky mingled in a brilliant sapphire; not a cloud was to be seen, not a breath stirred. From the house there came not a sound. Close at hand a sandwasp delved busily. Hicksey watched its sudden and impetuous movements. With every quick lifting of the wings it expressed the joy and the ecstasy of life. A creature fashioned to live in the bright sunlight. Dissatisfied with the hole it had so valiantly commenced, it flitted from place to place. Of a sudden, it fell dead and brittle upon the sand. Passing over some hollow that caught and reflected too fiercely the sun's rays, it had died of the sudden heat, which had by an accident of circumstance concentrated upon one place. Hicksey picked up its brittle body, looked at it for a moment, threw it aside, and fixed his eyes once more on the face of the opposite hill.

He had not been waiting more than ten minutes when he saw Sherwin's head raised cautiously

above the outline of the dune. In his hand was a rifle. Hicksey watched him settle himself down in a position commanding a good view of the house. Now was his chance; the man was armed and intent on murder. He was justified in taking the first shot. He put up his sight to four hundred yards. The range was an easy one; there should be no question of a miss. As he brought the butt of the rifle to his shoulder his hands were shaking. The overdose of strychnine that he had taken still kept his muscles twitching. He took aim just below the head; with so much heat radiation he must allow for refraction.

The crack of the rifle sounded intensely loud in the stillness. A white spat of sand flew up in Sherwin's face.

Hicksey raised himself rigid on his fore-arms for a better view. A miss—incredible! The next instant Sherwin had rolled into safety behind the ridge of the hill.

Following upon the shot came a short dumb silence. Then from the house a long-drawn scream, a scream desperate and heartrending, ugly and pathetic, that clove the still air and filled the hearts of the two listeners with sickening dread, with breathless fear, fear at the sudden knowledge that the less than human in our nature had broken loose and had escaped control. With a choking

gasp the scream changed to the long irregular outbreak of hysterics. The sound rose and fell, now gathering to desperate and passionate convulsions, now dying away to a hopeless and despairing chuckle. The inconsequent irregular stream of sound, now thinly pathetic, now raucous and threatening, turned upon itself, broke, and recovered. Human control had snapped and the cruel and senseless insistence of life ran on over deeps and shallows, eloquent of all the fear that lies hid in the heart of man.

For only an instant was Hicksey held by the sound, then he leapt back into safety. For some moments he lay still in the soft hollow of the dunes. He must think of a plan, some definite plan of attack. The idea pulsed through his head and became strangely tangled with the screams of the woman and with recollections of his earlier life on the island. His ideas came with great vividness, one on the heels of another. A press of sensations, varied and unrelated, raced through his brain, one close upon the other, like stars falling through space, leaving no track, and ever recurring the thought came that he must take action immediate and ruthless. Then close on the thought would come fear for his life, and fear at the woman whose screams rang in his ears. He stood up, perhaps he could think more coherently

standing than lying. Yes, if he valued his life he must get a clear view of his situation, make some sort of mental picture of the island, must take bearings from the sun, for it was easy enough to get lost amongst the high inland sand-hills. To the west, that was on his immediate right, was his house, a little north of that was Sherwin's house, and beyond that again was the hospital. These buildings were all backed by a high ridge of dunes. Beyond this ridge was a flat and open space, part of which was used as a burying-ground for dead natives. Then again to the eastward of this plain rose irregularly shaped hills that in billowy rises extended to the coast. He decided to keep amongst these hills, and hoped to get another shot at Sherwin across the open space of the burying-ground. He set off at a run, intending to make a wide sweep and come round behind some high crests that overlooked the burying-ground.

After he had jerked himself behind the sheltering edge of the hill, it took Sherwin some few seconds to gather his wits about him. He was surprised and rather dazed by this sudden and uncompromising way of being informed that the doctor had already taken alarm. Instead of the safe though exciting occupation of waiting for the opportunity of a shot, he must engage in a stalk

among the sand-hills and play the part of quarry as well as huntsman. For one heart's beat he felt afraid, but that passed in a moment. Now that it was a matter of life and death, and there was no possibility of drawing back, he felt no fear, but only mad and blinding rage. He had even a rash impulse to approach openly, to take all risks and at any rate settle the matter out of hand. His was the rage of a wild beast threatened and roused, and to augment his natural ferocity he was irritated by the screams that came from the house. Such sounds were an outrage on the daylight; they played on his strung nerves urging him to immediate action. Gripping his rifle he started to run from one sand-hill to another. Each rise he came to he peered over, hoping for a sight of the doctor. In a short while he came to the place where Hicksey had crouched waiting for his shot. He marked the footsteps leading away toward the centre of the island. At this sign of his adversary's caution he became in his turn more cautious, and judged it would be rash to follow too closely. He decided to keep to the cover of the hills and try for a long shot across the open.

All through the long hours of the midday and afternoon the two men hunted one another, crouching and dodging among the sand-hills. Once or twice they got a sight of a running figure that

quickly found cover before there was time for a shot. This seemed to be a struggle which endurance rather than any other human quality must decide. By this time they had led each other some distance from the house, and the far-distant cries had at length ceased. The quiet of the evening hung over the island, and in the south-west the sun was sinking into the sea. Both men, weary and parched with thirst, knew that between them no truce was possible. The instinct for killing was aroused and could not now be checked.

It was not till after sunset that Sherwin, as he ran from one clump of bushes to another, happened to notice a small hut that stood near the burying-ground, which was occasionally used for post-mortem examinations. He suddenly realized that this would be a good hiding-place and that Hicksey would never suspect him of being in it. Besides being a good place of shelter, it was an excellent post of observation, since it faced on to the open, and he would be able to see if Hicksey attempted to get back to the houses. He quickly stepped inside and stood close against the back wall so as to be better concealed. He was very tired and glad of a rest; after a while he became sleepy and dozed, letting his head fall back and rest against the iron wall of the hut.

Not half an hour later Hicksey passed by on the

opposite side of the hut; the same idea entered his head as had entered Sherwin's. He would hide in the hut, from which he could get an excellent opportunity of a shot. He approached very quickly, then, since the last few yards were across exposed ground, he ran and quickly whisked into the dark interior of the hut.

At the same instant, as he became conscious of stumbling over Sherwin's feet, a gun went off close to his head and a bullet tore its way through the roof. Close on the report came a roar of surprise and fear. For the first few moments both men were alarmed and clumsy in their actions, each thinking himself the attacked party. Face to face, they were at such close quarters that this was no place for rifles. They dropped their weapons and grappled with one another. Sherwin in his first surprise had let off his rifle at random, and then, seeing that the shot had taken no effect, had dropped it and had secured first grip on the doctor. He had his arms tight round and was trying to squeeze the breath out of him, and at the same time was jerking him up and down trying to rick his back. Hicksey, being much the smaller and lighter of the two, and having his arms gripped to his sides, found this difficult to combat with. He tried to work his right hand upward to a knife he carried in his belt. The two

men swayed to and fro, kicking at each other's legs, and from time to time bumping against the wall of the shed. Just when Hicksey had his hand on the hilt of his knife Sherwin saw what he was trying for. He let go his hold and clutched at the doctor's right arm that swung up for a blow. He caught his wrist and held it. Hicksey tried to change the knife from one hand to another and at the same time he kicked Sherwin's legs from under him. Both fell heavily on to the wooden floor of the hut and the knife was jerked far into a distant corner out of reach of either of the men. Hicksey being the lighter and the more agile made the best of the fall. Every ounce of him was hard gristle and bone, and he managed to twist himself on top of his adversary and for a moment hold him down. The next instant Sherwin had hurled him off, and had rolled over towards the knife. By this action he seriously endangered his position, for Hicksey was at him again at once, and this time managed to get his back against the wall and his foot into a crack in the floor, so that he could hold Sherwin powerless. Again and again Sherwin tried to wrench himself free, but the doctor had him in a strong grip and could not be shaken off. The knife still lay out of reach

of either of them, though the eyes of both men constantly rested upon it.

Finding himself helpless Sherwin began to curse, he used every foul epithet which in a fairly varied life he had ever heard. Hicksey kept his lips tight together, and pressed the harder on his enemy's wrists. Although Hicksey had the upper hand, his position was little better than Sherwin's; for if he moved he would lose his purchase, and, since he was further from the knife, would then be at a disadvantage. They were thus fixed in a deadlock; one unable, and the other daring not to move. In their minds they both argued that something must happen, but for the time they remained as they were, glaring at one another. Their fate was, however, near at hand, approaching, hesitating and bewildered, in the shape of a black and half-tamed savage.

Late in the afternoon Coffee had woken from his drunken sleep. He had rubbed his bruised limbs and then had looked about for his master. He saw no sign of him, and there was no sound to tell where he might be. He walked out into the rays of the setting sun. Sherwin was nowhere in sight. Then he walked on up the sand-hill and looked at the doctor's house. That also was silent, and he saw no sign of any one

moving. He turned and walked toward the hospital. No one was there either. He was puzzled; where could the white men have got to? None of the natives at the camp or at the hospital had seen anything of them. He was afraid at a sense of the unusual. It was very strange that he should have slept so late; no doubt something equally strange had happened to his white masters. Then suddenly he heard the report of a rifle. Ah! they must have gone out shooting wallabies. This explanation was reasonable, but it did not make him feel quite at ease, nor did it banish his feeling of loneliness and desertion. Even though Sherwin should curse at him for his intrusion, he would go and see what they were doing. He set out in the direction from which he had heard the report of the rifle. Before going very far he came upon Sherwin's track. This he followed, and was surprised at the curious number of turns and zig-zags it made. Why was his master walking in that curious manner and scrambling up the side of the sand-hills, only to run down again? At length he came in sight of the hut; then he heard his master's voice very angry indeed, rising and falling in familiar oaths. He hesitated whether he should go any further; the sense that something unusual was happening

became stronger; he was afraid, but he was also afraid to go back past the burying-ground in the gathering twilight. In the dark his imagination peopled the whole land with ghosts, and at the thought of those that haunted the burying-ground he became still more frightened and ran headlong towards the hut.

The sight that greeted him was as alarming as any conjured by his imagination. The two white men were dimly discernible at the far end of the hut crouching upon the ground, and his master was swearing horribly.

As soon as Sherwin caught sight of him he shouted out: "Here, Coffee, you've just come at the right time. Here, help me, help!"

The black had but the vaguest idea as to what was happening; he thought that perhaps the two white men were struggling with a ghost, and his first instinct was to run away; but then there was the burying-ground to be passed. On an impulse he flung himself wildly forward to his master's help.

Hicksey leapt up and struck him in the face, and tried to push by to the open; Coffee clutched at him and clung to his arm. Sherwin was not long in using his opportunity. In an instant he had gained the knife and with quick, savage stabs

had three times thrust it into the doctor's back. Hicksey gasped, uttered a short cry, and fell back limp and quivering on the sand.

At the sight and the touch of the hot blood on his hands the rapid fury of Sherwin's heart was changed to fear. He remembered that this that he had done was called murder and that men were hanged for no worse a deed. He remembered with sudden anguish that there still existed that vast and powerful society which had thrust him forth, which had taken no thought for his needs or frailties, but had asked only that he should do its work, and now once more would put forth hands to claim him, would accuse him of murder, and perhaps in the unquestioned power of its grip would persuade him that he had committed a crime worthy of death. His whole nature protested at the thought. That was a lie; he could never believe that. The most primitive instincts of his manhood had prompted him to the deed; it was done and beyond regret or recall. He would defy society and live. Sudden dread of a witness possessed him; he gripped the knife firmly in his hand and looked across at Coffee, who stood watching him from the other side of the body of the man he had killed. From his face he could read nothing; it was blank and inscrutable. Methods of escape, lies to be invented,

ideas of all colours flashed through his mind, among others that of killing Coffee presented itself; but human gratitude made it impossible that he should kill the man who had just saved his life. If he could implicate Coffee that would be his safest plan. He suddenly leapt upon him, seized him by the throat, shook him and forced him backward against the wall of the hut. The savage was limp with terror in his grasp.

When Sherwin saw that there was no resistance left in the man he loosed him and let him breathe. He then presented him with the knife and told him to stab the body of the doctor.

Coffee was bewildered. "That one already dead fellow," he protested..

"Do as I tell you and don't speak back to me," roared Sherwin, and struck him on the mouth with the butt of the knife.

Coffee, frightened and cowed, did as he was commanded; he stooped down and three times buried the knife in the doctor's breast.

Sherwin's face expressed a savage satisfaction, and for a moment he seemed less mad with rage and fear; then, with a grip of terror, he remembered the woman at the house. He snatched the knife from Coffee, and, shouting to him to follow, made off with staggering and irregular steps across the sand-dunes.

## CHAPTER XX

AT the firing of the first shot Alice Desmond had stood tense and quivering. That sound, that so easily clove the stillness and sent the echoes tumbling across the water, shattered the last fragments of her strained control. Like live, mad things rising in her throat, tearing at her breast, sobs and screams had their way with her. The loosening of so hard-kept a resistance was in itself a relief, and the babbling language of despair was more tolerable than the close scrutiny of silent things, things inanimate in the room that cruelly watched for the nervous twitch of a muscle, or mocked at any innocent deception that would suggest the appearance of calm. At length, tired out and empty of hope and energy, she sank upon the floor sobbing quietly to herself. Before long she slept—silence once more rested upon the house.

When she woke, it was to hear a footstep on the verandah. She raised herself in apprehension, then listened, motionless. The boards on the verandah creaked, then were silent. Her heart, like a bird caught in a net, was held still,

then, suddenly breaking free, it fluttered desperately in her throat. Again a step sounded and a hand was laid on the knob of the door. The next moment Sherwin had flung it open and entered the room. With a short cry, that was half a gasp for breath, she leapt to her feet. White and quivering she regarded him. There stood the incarnation of all her terrors; the murderer, gaunt and haggard, his clothes soaked red with the blood of his victim. All the devilish of our nature, let loose to work evil, yet still contained in human form, was there. A flash of knowledge, a certainty, came at the first glance of his eyes; it chilled her with an intenser dread, and drove out all memory of the past, all hope of the future. She saw in that instant that the fear of a witness was on him. The fever of killing, that lust of the knife, still had him gripped. There was murder written on every feature of his face, in the pose of every limb, in the come and go of his breath, in the shifting glance of his eye; murder not yet accomplished, but still threatening and immediate. Yes, in the power of that desperate logic that fears a witness, he would kill her, and in the next few minutes all would be over. She caught herself wondering where he would plunge the knife on whose hilt his fingers were now so nervously twitching. The silence enveloped them. In it

she could hear even the faint sound of his blood-moist fingers tightening and loosening their grip. He turned and deliberately closed the door. Her mouth was dry and parched; all her senses, doubly alive in this hour of death, were fixed sharp to anticipate his smallest movement. Swaying as he moved he came a step towards her. She took a corresponding step back. Thus, facing each other with eyes fixed, they moved across the room. For five steps she retreated, then her heel touched the wall. She steadied herself with the palms of her hands flat against it for support; with her fingers she pressed fretfully against one of the bevels of the match-boarding. Standing upright with shoulders hunched and head thrown back she watched his approach. For a moment he paused, and she knew that his hand was tightening on the knife. In that moment of respite her brain became vividly clear. Images of life and death, at other times mingled, had now disentangled themselves from the web of her thoughts. She saw them poised and separate, then they rushed together, mingled, and again separated. In the gulf between she saw her own life, at first pitiful and small, then growing in importance, and finally, in the swelling climax of its being, leaping upon her, identifying itself with her own body, claiming at all cost to be saved.

Her hands had left the wall and were now clenched at her sides, the finger nails deep in the moist palms. Like timid, diffident creatures they crept upwards towards her breast, to her throat, to her chin. Her eyes strove with all their shining vitality to hold the man where he stood. For a while her fingers fumbled at the neck of her dress, then with a quick downward movement she tore open the neck of her blouse. Petulantly she snatched at the torn silk shreds, leaving her white bosom exposed. Her eyes never left the man's face. As she watched, she saw it go whiter even than before, and in his eyes, she read the knowledge that he was conscious of the fluttered beating of her heart and the come and go of her breath. She raised her hands, covering her breasts, pressing upon them with dimpling fingers. Still the man did not move, only drew sharply his breath between his lips. With supreme daring, as if already celebrating her victory, she leaned back her head against the wall and watched him through half-shut eyes. On his face she read all her danger. There was written there the sentence of her death, her death already accomplished. She saw that in his imagination he had already plunged in the knife. Might not the picture of the deed hide from him her own living body? She saw that like a mask it hung before his eyes.

He came a step nearer; his face was contorted with the struggle of his emotions. In that instant she saw the turn of her fate. She was saved. The lust for the knife was not so strong on him as the natural right to hold and to possess. With a half cry he ran forward, letting the knife fall on the floor at his feet. She closed her eyes, and with no least thrill of repugnance waited his embrace. There was no question of regretting the price of her victory, only gratefulness that her life was safe. She felt his hands touch her, felt his hot breath on her face and his eager kisses. When he lifted her and carried her across the room, she was content to believe herself in the arms of her true master and mate. Then a throb of fear shot through her heart, the consciousness of a new danger. She stiffened herself in his arms, thrusting herself from him. Her movements had in them resistance but not antagonism. He was surprised at the submission and sudden tenderness of her withstanding. It surely had in it supplication and not defiance.

"Not now; please not now." The glance of her dark eyes thrilled him. "Think first of your safety. You must change your clothes; they are horrible with blood."

He stood questioning her with his glance, uncertain of her meaning. She leant toward him

and whispered: "Please let me go now; later I will do anything that you wish."

His hands, that were round her, unfastened, but, as if afraid of her escape, he snatched at her wrist.

She spoke as if admonishing him for a fault, guarding him from evil. "Look at the blood on your clothes; your shirt is soaked with it. Go and change them, hide them away." Then suddenly questioning, anxious for certainty: "Is he dead?" she asked.

"Yes, he's dead, sure enough. It was him or me and fair fight"; then suspiciously: "What are you driving at?"

Her brain raced ahead. To find safety for herself, she must find it for him also. The new life, the picture of which she had so suddenly and vividly seen, must stand on a firm base of safety. She flashed questions at him. "What will you do with the body? Where's Coffee?"

He looked distrustfully at her. "Coffee's right; he had a hand in it."

"Is there no chance of his telling?"

"No; Coffee won't tell." Suddenly he grabbed at her again and fiercely drew her toward him.

"No, no, let me go," she pleaded, pushing with her hands against his chest. "Not now; no, I won't."

He held her close and glowered at her. "And you; what will you tell of me?" He bent her backward, gripping her arms in his strong hands.

"Oh, you are hurting me!" she cried.

He gripped the tighter, and with his face close to hers again demanded: "And what about you; will you tell of me?"

She was frightened at the fierce glance of his eye. "No," she gasped. "I hated him."

"Then give me a kiss."

She moved her lips towards him and lay unresisting in his grasp. "Let me go, please," she murmured.

To her surprise he relinquished his hold. In the first embarrassment of finding herself free she began to tidy her disarranged hair and dress. He watched her in silence, wondering what she would do.

He became, as he watched her, unexpectedly fascinated by the manner of her movement. It was is if, looking into some crystal, she saw unexpectedly the true nature of a human soul, of his own soul perhaps. This woman's body had in its compass the magical power to give him happiness and faith. He saw her as a man born and nurtured in the dark might see a flower for the first time—a flower that opened a bold and beautiful face fearlessly to the sun, a flower that was born

of the sun's heat, was nourished by its daily shining and that died without remorse in the natural passage of the seasons. Here was a life born of the primitive earth, an expression of life, graceful and mysterious. It was within his grasp, yet only to be secured by the sincere expression of his nature and not by any histrionic or over-wrought extravagance. As he now watched her she moved without fear or hesitation, seeming to gather confidence from the directness of his gaze.

In these moments of silence there grew between them an understanding, a mutual antipathy toward the crude and the extravagant. To both of them had been shown, by virtue of their own unflinching vitality, a way to life renewed and rebaptized. Yet how could life be possible without convention and restraint? By one irreparable act, the significance of which was embodied in the corpse of the dead man, they were cut off from the world; and yet, just at that moment when all seemed lost, life had surprised and awed them with new possibilities. Together with the accepted values of mankind's morality had fallen away the cruder expressions of his brutality, and they now confronted one another, man and woman, in the simplicity of their first mating.

She came towards him with a diffidence that cleared away as she spoke. The more urgent

difficulties and dangers of the situation had all of a sudden given place to a comparative calm.

"Where is the body?" she asked.

"Down on the flat the other side of the hospital."

"You must bury it tonight. Don't leave it till tomorrow. One of the natives might find it. Then change your clothes. While you are away I will tidy the house and make all this straight. I want time by myself."

"It will be dark down there," the man objected. "Why fret so much about him? he's dead."

"Never mind about the dark. You're not afraid. I want to feel that his body is buried and that all that past is done with. Have you matches?"

He handed her a box and she lit the lantern and put it into his hands. "Go, I will wait for you here till you come back."

He looked at her half-suspiciously. By going he stood to lose all; she might be tricking him. But then, he stood to win! Faith and happiness were in the balance, and self-love, self-honour stirred with a sudden pulse of his heart. He guessed from the resolute glance of her eyes that her instinct towards life was true and that in this crisis she was handling it worthily. Yes, he would risk everything. It was well worth while.

He abruptly turned to her. "I shall be gone for about an hour. I shall come back here, and in future shall live in this house." Then, before she had time to answer, he strode out into the gathering darkness.

The door slammed behind him and Alice Desmond was left staring at its cheap, ill-built frame. For a while she stood listening to his departing footsteps. Then, as the discreet and muffling silence of the outer world crept in at the open window, she gave a little shiver of fatigue. She remembered that she had an intolerable thirst and went to the canvas water-bottle hanging in the verandah and drank deeply. She went to the bedroom, washed and brushed herself, arranging her hair carefully in front of the glass. Then she went back to the sitting-room and began to tidy the disorder of the room. Before long she came upon the knife. She picked it up gingerly, went to the open window and threw it out. It fell almost noiselessly, burying itself in the sand.

When all was in order and the supper laid, she went out on to the verandah and sat down in the long deck chair. She was glad to rest passive and to listen to the quiet noises of the night. The distant waves breaking on the shore, the buzz of some impetuous insect against a window pane, the occasional cry of a night-bird and the scuttle of walla-

bies in the scrub, all these noises spoke to her of the sanity and well-adjusted order of life. She leant back, letting her eyes rest on the dark and distant line of the horizon. The wide peacefulness of the sea caressed and hushed the land to sleep. Overhead the bright glitter of the stars tempted her thoughts to stray among the wide spaces of the night, and be lost in the knowledge of their majestic calm, of their unconcerned splendour.

Not more than a mile distant Sherwin was digging a grave. He stood deep in the hole shovelling lustily, and the sweat, which dropped from his face, made moist his uncut red hair that clung in wisps to his forehead. He hummed to himself broken catches of a song, lest the solitude and the strange character of his work might make him afraid. When the hole was sufficiently deep he leapt out and walked towards the lonely iron hut that stood, a black mass, against the background of scrub. He held the lantern high that it might cast the better light.

The body of Hicksey was lying on its back, the white face staring blankly into the yellow rays of the lantern. Sherwin bent over the dead man, closed the vacant eyes and bent down the stiff arms to his sides. At that moment he had no feeling of remorse, neither had he the least shadow of vin-

dictiveness against his adversary. It had been a fair fight; each had carried his life in his hands, and by the favour of fortune he had won. In other circumstances he might have been good friends with the young doctor. He had always wished for his friendship, but his offers had been accepted too late. Now their rivalry had come violently to an end, and he carried no grudge to let fall into the grave. Holding the dead man by the shoulders he dragged him to the edge of the hole that he had dug, then, with little ceremony, tumbled him in. Quickly he shovelled back the sand. The grave was deep, and here on the flat the wind was hardly likely to blow away the sand, and so disclose the remains. His task done, and the ground once more level, he picked up his lantern, and, shouldering his spade, walked away towards his house, leaving the doctor alone together with his dead hopes, ambitions, and aspirations. Sherwin was sorry for the dead man, in that he was no longer alive and able to taste the sensuous pleasures of life; he never guessed at all the burning hope, the faith in a great purpose that was buried there in the tumbled sand-grave. He had looked upon Hicksey as an energetic, cold, unfriendly man, and he had never seen the fanatic and devotee to science, a man living in the thought of his work and for his work, who had been side-

tracked and thrown away on this bare and desolate island, destined to failure by the love of a woman who was never his mate, a woman who had taught him to hate and despise both himself and her.

Sherwin made quickly towards his house, glad to be done with his task. A new picture of life was opening before him. The thought of Alice Desmond thrilled him with warmth and pleasure. He marvelled that she should so quickly and firmly get a hold upon his heart. Subconsciously he knew that her instinct for life was true and admirable, and with satisfaction he assured himself that she was simple and easily understood. He could see her actions and motives in their unadorned simplicity; no doubt she would understand him; give him that sympathy he so long had needed. As he walked from the grave of the murdered man, there was in his heart a song of thanksgiving and praise, a thankfulness towards life and a keen anticipation of its new possibilities. Happiness came thus unexpectedly, turning guilt to innocence, opening new channels, lifting new horizons. The prospect of a simple and satisfying life had suddenly shone for him through all the clouds of his suffering. The miracle of that fact changed all his immediate surroundings, all his thoughts and desires. The island scenery was

satisfying and full of peace. The civilization of that world which he had left had become a shadow irrelevant and meaningless; here a larger simplicity ministered to his soul.

He found his house dark and empty. He lit all the lamps. A desire for tidiness and order suddenly beset him; life, to be possible, must be clothed, must have its nakedness adorned. He washed and changed his clothes, then he brushed his long hair that hung red and shaggy over his ears. He spent some time clipping his beard before the glass. He was interrupted by the appearance of Coffee, who was still trembling with fear, haunted by the dread of spirits and devil-devils. The black was surprised but much reassured by the neat show that his master made, and hurried away in response to the order to bury the clothes that lay discarded on the floor.

The fact that the foul and blood-stained evidences of his violence were now being buried, and that he stood in his best clean white suit, made Sherwin feel extraordinarily far removed from the crude emotions of his former self, and when he stepped out on to the well-known path that led over the sand-hill, it was with a new feeling of assurance and hope.

As he came in view of the house, in which Alice Desmond was waiting for him, his heart beat with

a new pulse of fear. The building seemed very quiet and empty. The lights were burning in the front rooms, but there was no sound of any sentient thing. He approached with long strides, and not till quite close did he pause and listen intently. The house raised itself in blank planes against the darkness of the night. All that he hoped of life was within those silent and unpretentious walls. He looked up at the stars; they seemed infinitely remote. He knew not yet how to interpret the distant and numerous sparkles. Were they always to shine for him with cruel indifference, branding upon his soul his insignificance and misery? Or would they perhaps receive significance from the softness of a woman's surrender and symbolize, now blazing, now trembling in abashed beauty, the depths and intricacies of life revealed? Not only the stars and the night sky, but all material and spiritual things trembled and wavered before the promise of faith and happiness, a faith that he had staked all to win. With hope and fear struggling in his heart he walked to the steps that led to the verandah. There was a slight stir in the darkness above him. With two quick strides he mounted the steps, then paused motionless, listening to his own heart beats and the quick breathing of the woman, who sat so still in the darkness not six feet distant. Her eyes

held him, wrapped him round, and kindled, in the directness of their gaze, a warm and flickering pain. She spoke no word, but sat motionless in the soft quality of the silence and the night.

In two steps he stood close to her, then quickly bent down, and, with a cry of mingled joy and pain, gripped her in his arms and covered her upturned face with kisses. With a sob of relief and joy she flung her arms about his neck. The night, ponderous and immense, bent above them in an arc of glittering stars which, in the far distance, touched and mingled with the restless and ever-moving sea.

## CHAPTER XXI

NOT till some days after the death of Dr. Hicksey did the cutter arrive at Kanna Island. Sherwin reported that while swimming far out to sea Hicksey had been attacked by several large sharks and had been pulled under. No sign of his body had yet appeared. Any one who had witnessed the doctor's recklessness could not have been surprised at this story, but would only say with Pomfrey that they had expected as much and always had prophesied an early death for the young man.

The death was ultimately reported to headquarters, and an investigation was promised. This investigation was no more than a word used in official circles, and never reached as far as the iron shed by the burying-ground with the smooth sand-grave beside it. Mr. Keynes did, however, visit the islands, and decided to have the men's hospital moved to Fenton Island. He saw that not many men would so lightly risk their lives in a small boat as Hicksey had done, and that the objections to having both hospitals on one island could be overcome. In a conversation with Sherwin he agreed to use Kanna Island as a small

sheep station, which, under capable management, would be sufficient to provision the hospitals with meat. Sherwin was obviously the man to put in charge.

On Fenton Island some surprise was expressed at Nurse Desmond's quick change of partners, but, since she was not present to stimulate their resentment or indignation, the subject soon lost interest in the more pressing question as to who was to be the future head of the hospitals. In this James's hopes were not fulfilled; he was passed over, and a fully qualified man, together with a new matron, arrived to take the chief command.

So far as the world was concerned, and its immediate interests in Kaimera, little more was heard of Sherwin. He was a figure easily lost sight of in the advance of a young colony, a colony pressing forward, eager to assimilate in a few years the civilization won by Europe in centuries of strife and toil. To the authorities, the only people with whom he came in contact, he proved himself a capable sheep-farmer, and was always ready with a supply of meat equal to the demand. He never asked for a holiday, or expressed any desire to leave the island. In the long intervals, during which no one visited Kanna Island, he was forgotten, and only the sailors, who occasionally called with stores of provisions, wondered at the

strange red-headed man who lived alone with his woman in that solitary place, served and shadowed by a black and naked savage, whose inscrutable and ugly face betrayed no emotion, gave no clue to his thoughts or feelings.

When Keynes, two years later, went over to visit the island, he found a small red-headed baby crawling on the verandah of the solitary iron house; and the back room, that one time was full of Hicksey's instruments, was now converted into a nursery. Keynes, in the course of his life, had come in contact with many white men who were forced by circumstances to live far from their kind, and he obseved Sherwin with interest. He found in him something, at the same time, final and primitive, something extraordinarily free and individual. No doubt that the man was happy, and had found the harmony in life that so many hope for and so few attain. Keynes' interest was caught and held by the man. He thought of his own life, and guessed vaguely that he had missed something which Sherwin had found. But he too had found happiness, and how else than by satisfying his desire to work and to accomplish what other men failed in. He had, besides, a good conscience, and that was perhaps the secret of the whole thing. In Sherwin and Alice Desmond he discerned the naïveté and self-sufficiency

of wild animals. They were not, as are human beings, abashed or apologetic for the unusualness of any action, but went their own way with a simple disregard for what a stranger might think. Often in the evening Sherwin would sit in the dark shadow of the verandah and drink his evening Kava. Coffee, who was growing very wrinkled and surly, would sit beside him and chew the root, spitting the fragments into a bowl from which they made their common drink. Alice would sometimes come for her share, but generally she avoided Keynes. She was shy and retiring in his presence, though he heard her talk loud and volubly when alone with her man.

Keynes's visit was only of a few days' duration; he was not sufficient master of his own time to be able to stay on and observe this solitary couple for as long as he wished. Sherwin came down to the shore to bid him farewell. While he was waiting for the dinghy to pull in and fetch him he asked: "And how does this solitary life suit you, cut off as you are from the world? Do you never want to go back to the mainland?"

"No, I've all I wish for here," Sherwin answered slowly. "All any man could wish for," he added after a pause. "I never want to go away, never want to go back. I like this place better than any part I've set foot on."

"Don't you feel lonely at times?"

"No, I'm not lonely now any longer, and what's more, I can't understand how I ever could have been lonely here." Then, as if apologetically, he added: "I've learnt to see and feel so many things."

Keynes was interested. "What sort of things?" he asked.

"Oh, just little things; you wouldn't take much stock by them; the hot sun on the sand, the noise of the waves on the shore and sometimes the feel of the wind, and the red and yellow butterflies clinging to the thorn bushes."

Keynes was silent for a moment. "Well, good-bye," he said, and gripped Sherwin by the hand. He had a slight shudder at feeling there were only three fingers. "I daresay I shall come over again in twelve months' time. I'm glad you've found the job that suits you."

He jumped into the dinghy that had just grounded on the shore. Then, shoving off, he was paddled to where the cutter waited for him.

Several times during the slow passage from the shore he looked back on the long irregular coast of the island. He saw that Sherwin had climbed to the top of the high sand-hill, and stood there, a solitary figure, watching him out of sight.

THE END

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